落ちてきた龍王（ナーガ）と滅びゆく魔女の国
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落ちてきた龍王と滅びゆく魔女の国
IV

「あ、こら、そんなところに、
あっ、顔をっ、つけるなっあっ」
「むふん。エリュシオーネって
意外と毛ぶか……」

～踊り子たちの艶舞～

「奴は化け物か！」
ジュエルジュードは右手の豪槍を右から左へと薙いだ。
最初の一撃で十五、六体ほどの木偶人形が戦闘不能に陥っていた。

Naga's Camp
(Faction of the witches)
Naga
The young man who holds the name of the Dragon King. Fell from another world
Harrigan
The head of Haindler clan. She can control her hair of her own accord.
Ais
A gentle witch who looks after others, but, scary once she gets angry. Proud of her monstrous strength.
Lela
An intellectual and calm witch. She is interested in Naga's world.
Yuuki
A witch capable of controlling wind. She greatly despises men.
あらすじ
Cu
A usually quiet witch. Capable of controlling belts coiled around her body.
Nonoel
A witch capable o controlling water. She refers to anyone by honofirfics.
Kay
A vigorous mood-maker. She fights by hardening her body.
Harlequin
A witch who can talk with animals. When she uses her magic, her eyes become heterochromatic
Ixine
A witch who controls tattoo-like patterns drawn on her body. She is also skilful in horseriding.
Linne & Linna
Twin-sisters and witches. Capable of sharpening their five senses through the use of magic.
Elysione
Vita's right hand. With her magic, she can teleport from one mantle to another.
Vita
The head of Suleymaya. She may look young, but... This witch can use a powerful magic to control gravity.
Raibach
Kasandora Kingdom's former captain. Currently, working for Naga.
Humans' Side
Jeweljude
Leader of the brigade of 88. Proud of his overwhelming fighting strength.
Aiba
The Great Cardinal of the Old Church who administers borderlands. His aim is to completely exterminate the witches.

Prologue 1

1

Yuuki, who had gone out scouting, returned back on her hoverboard at full speed towards Fort Ein.

“They’re coming, they’re coming, they’re coming! A troop from Kasandora Kingdom is heading this way!”

Rapidly descending down on her hoverboard, Yuuki flew around the inside of the fort at a low height while shouting with a loud voice.

The witches, both inside and outside of the buildings, broke into a run after hearing Yuuki’s warning.

Yuuki had a minimum number of her ultrathin clothes put on her, but there were many witches wearing more or less some sort of armor. Despite saying so, their armors were either wooden or leather made ones, so as not to affect their flow of magic. The witches kept gathering one after another inside an open space of the fort. Naga who had already arrived there asked Yuuki for a confirmation of the enemy’s position.

“What’s their number?” “I wonder if it’s not around a thousand.” “Were they carrying any heavy weaponry for a castle siege?” “I guess that would be a catapult. They had 2 of them, and apart from that, a single battering ram, I think.” “Anything else that stood out?” “Not really.”

“Is that so? Thank you for your hard work.”

Hovering in the air, Yuuki averted her eyes with a slightly flushed face.

“N….No, I haven’t done anything in particular, just the usual. It isn’t something to be praised for, especially, not by you.” “Doing what one’s ought to do, even that deserves some praise, no?” “Ah, that’s right. Well, if you really want to compliment me, shouldn’t you do it as much as possible?”

(Not like I'm doing it on a whim, but….)

"While we're at it, will you go and keep an eye on the enemy's movements once more?" "It's what I'm in charge of, so I don't need you to tell me that."

The wind gathered around Yuuki's hoverboard while creating a vortex. Immediately after that, she soared into the sky as if bouncing off the ground with an unnoticeable force.

Naga looked up at her hoverboard growing smaller inside the slightly cloudy sky. Finally, shifting back his sight and directing it toward the present witches, he issued instructions in rapid succession.

"Elysione will recheck if all the coats are available for use." "Kay, tag alongside with Elysione." "Ixine, Raibach, bring the horses."

"Harrigan, we'll be preparing for a sortie. Order others to open the gate." "Vita too, can you help me?" "Harlequin, go release the animals." "Ais, you're prepared to throw cobble, right? "Those who are assigned to this fort's garrison, take your positions."

Receiving Naga's orders, the witches continued to scatter.

Shortly thereafter, Raibach brought 2 horses by their reins.

"Naga-sama!" "Ohh, good work."

Naga, who easily saddled his own horse, reached out his hand towards Vita.

"Grab on!" "I can do it by myself."

Saying so, Vita lightly pushed off from the ground.

Once her body was thought to dance high into the air, she gently placed herself on the saddle just like a falling feather.

"Ah, true. I forgot you can make yourself light." "That's right. Even if the horse was to be almost three meters tall, I can still easily mount it." "Even I would have a problem mounting such a tall horse!"

Naga turned around the horse after retorting like that.

"Excellent. Those who are ready, follow me!"

As soon as Naga kicked his horse's flank and pulled its reins, he ran off towards

the gate.

Raibach followed after on his horse.

“Ah~, Naga-san, please waitttt”

Ixine, whose setting off was a bit delayed, chased after them both while shaking her long hair tied in a bundle on her back.

Learning about Kasandora Kingdom’s movements from Yuuki, Naga postponed his investigation into his enemy’s state of affairs and proceeded to counterattack. Just as Naga predicted, the kingdom of Kasandora would sooner or later come to retake their fort, but, their number was less than what he had anticipated. One could probably say it was the best Kasandora could dispatch right now, as they didn’t appear to have any other forces. In other words – they were weakened. Naga, who ran off to the outside of the fort, could tell there were around a thousand enemy troops approaching.

(We can repel them if it’s that many. Once we manage to deal with Kasandora Kingdom, they shouldn’t have any spare power left to attack us. They’re trying to buy time, in order not to let us strengthen this fort’s defenses and establish the country of the witches.)

However, Naga still wasn’t aware of the most elite troop that belonged to the Holy Chivalric Order of the Old Church, the Brigade of 88, being included.

3

The main road that ran from the capital of the Kasandora Kingdom to Fort Ein was just like a path connecting a mountainous zone and a hilly area. With only a mountain forest and a wasteland existing in its surroundings, there were neither cities nor villages, or even cultivated lands to be seen. Apparently, the road was said to have been originally used by merchants who travelled along the Schweiz River from the city of Lancel, located near the mouth of the river. Even Fort Ein was built in order to protect them, and recently, it had become the frontline base for countering the witches. On top of a slightly elevated hill located near the road, there was a small hut erected in a place of digging. The hut was most likely built in a big rush, as it was roughly done and had many cracks. Not even a single sign of life could be felt from its interior. Inside that empty and confined room, only a single, thin mantle was spread out on top of the floor. However,

that mantle began to slowly rise.

Finally, Elysione's head stuck out from within it. What's more, as the mantle continued to rise, Elysione's body was fully materializing.

"Umm…. did we arrive?"

A voice from inside the mantle was heard.

"Yes."

Elysione's bare skin became exposed as she coiled the mantle. She was wearing nothing apart from the mantle, but that was simply due to the nature of her skill, which only allowed her to carry living things. While it's obvious that metal thwarts magic, even a single piece of cloth is capable of obstructing one's skill. That's why Elysione wouldn't wear a single thread whenever she teleports with her magic.

At her feet, Kay was crawling out in a squirming manner, nevertheless, she too was fully nude. As long as Elysione held a person in her arms, they would be able to teleport as well, but the condition was they had to be naked.

"Can I wear something?" "There's no such thing here." "Eh……?"

"That's because we would have to teleport to the next mantle anyway, sooner or later. Wearing clothes at each stop is a waste of time."

Kay looked up at Elysione, who was wearing her mantle, with a miserable face.

"No…. do you mean to say I should remain naked, whereas, it's fine for you to cover your body with that mantle?" "Don't you always look naked anyway? And now, you're feeling embarrassed?" "N, No. Well, that may be true, but….. but, even if it's a single cord, wearing something feels different from wearing nothing?"

"Stop complaining. I'm going to leave you like that here."

Seeing how Elysione's head began to sink, Kay panicked while making a commotion. Flustered about the fact of being left behind like that, Kay jumped at Elysione.

"Ah, hey, don't coil the mantle!"

As a result of the mantle being rolled up by Kay, Elysione's lower half of body became exposed. "Let me in, let me in, let me in."

Kay thrusted in her head through the part of the mantle that was coiled.

"Hey, that place, ah, don't push your face thereee! "Mufun. Elysione, I didn't know you were this hair-

Bang!

"Aw, that hurts! "I told you not to push your face in there!"

Kay, who pulled out her head from the mantle, gently brushed the punched back of her head.

"Honestly, don't punch me this strong when I'm not hardened…." "Shut up. I'll seriously leave you behind if you aren't obedient. I guess, you'd enjoy walking around like this." "Uwaaa, please spare me from that."

Kay bowed down in a docile manner toward Elysione.

"If you don't want it to happen, then be obedient." "Okay."

Kay crawled under the mantle in a hurry, as Elysione spread out its hem.

"Fine, then let's teleport to the next mantle."

Multiple mantles containing Elysione's own magic were placed along the main road, in case of emergency. With them, it's possible for Elysione (and one more person) to move around the main road within a blink of time. Just now, Elysione was checking on the mantles' functionality, whereas, Kay was tagging along as her guard. It was their last check.

"Ah, speaking of which,"

Kay raised her voice from inside of the mantle.

"Elysione, if Naga-san is determined to carry out an infiltration and survey, will you follow him?" "No, I wonder about that. It hasn't been decided yet, but…" "If something was to happen to Naga-san, would you escape together with him?" "I guess…. so." "In other words, you'd would do so even if it meant for you to transport the naked Naga-san, right?" "Uuuuuuh……."

Elysione warped her face while slightly groaning. Naturally, Kay, who was

hiding inside the mantle and clinging to Elysione's waist couldn't see it, however,

"Does it mean you'd be willing to carry him when teleporting? Regardless of being totally naked and clinging to each other?!" "I, I don't want to think about it, so don't touch on that topic any further!" "Eh? You don't like it? You don't want to do those things?" "As if I would?!" "Eh~, you really aren't interested in doing that? Even though I was envying you."

Elysione warped her face again and asked back. "E, Envy me? You mean embracing with a man while being naked?" "No, it's not about a man, but Naga-san, you see. Even I would hate to have a man as my partner." "So you don't mind as long it's Naga-dono?" "You see, back when Naga-san gave me a ride, somehow, I felt a bit nostalgic after clinging to his back. You could say that the memories of my father came back to me?" Elysione made an astonished face this time.

"You, can recall things about your father?" "Should you describe it as recalling? It's just a mere fragment from my memory, but you see…." "Is that so?" "That's why I was wondering if I could remember more about my father, were I to embrace Naga-san" "While being naked?"

Kay responded quite indifferently.

"Yes, while being naked."

Elysione looked under her feet with a dumbfounded expression.

"In that case, I wonder if you shouldn't place your trust in Naga-dono and say 'Please embrace with me while naked', or maybe, it would be better to get naked and intrude into that man's bedroom?"

Uhyaaa – a hysteric voice was raised from the mantle's inside.

"As expected, it's embarrassing. It's too embarrassing, so nooooo." "Hey, don't struggle!"

Elysione scolded Kay, who was clinging to her while shaking her own body. As she did so, Elysione breathed a sigh.

"Good to know that even you have some shame." "Uwaaa, I've been told something rude just now." "It's not the right time for idle talks, so let's go to our

next destination.” “Yes, please do it~”

They both disappeared from the hut immediately after Elysione’s head had sunk down, and the only thing left was the mantle that spread out on the floor.

4

By the time Elysione and Kay finished their job and returned, only a group in charge house-sitting was there. They both teleported to a mantle that had been put the closest to the place of anticipated counterattack. There, Naga’s group was in the middle of preparing to counter. Elysione left the naked Kay behind and walked toward her comrades, after which she received a change of clothes and took them back to Kay. Despite them being spares, they were the same, usual, ultrathin clothes. Still, for Kay, who was able to use hardening magic, there was no need to prepare armor, even for a battle. Wearing a minimum amount of clothing, Kay reached the place of Naga and the rest.

“Ooh, is that you, Kay? Thank you for your hard work.” “Ahhhh, yes, you too.”

Being watched in front, Kay averted her eyes as if feeling something bad.

“What? What’s the matter?”

Seeing Elysione approaching from behind Kay, Naga moved his sight towards her and asked.

“Did something bad happen when you teleported together?” “No, I don’t think that’s the case.”

Elysione replied while making a broad grin.

“Tha girl, Kay, she might come to Naga-dono’s bedroom with a request, I think.” “Ha? What do you mean?”

In front of Naga who was blinking with surprise, Kay jumped at Elysione.

“Don’t say ittttttttt!” “KhKhey, don’t close people’s mouuh!”

Kay blocked Elysione's mouth with her right hand as if trying to stretch herself. She was slowly fainting while following Elysione's movements.

"Should you mention anything about that, I'll strip of that mantle of yours, alright? And if that happens, it will be in front of Naga-san, you know?" "Tha whoul be trouvesome."

"With that, Elysione's huge breasts and thickly haired crotch would be completely expo——" "Uwaaaaaaaa!"

This time, it was Elysione's turn to close Kay's mouth.

"Youh ah dwead if yu sah a word." "Youh thwoo."

Elysione and Kay blocked their opponent's mouths while glaring at each other.

Finally, they both put a smile on their drawn faces and nodded.

"I won't touch on that matter again." "I think we've reached a mutual agreement."

"What's that? Looks like the two of you've become quite friendly with each other. As one would expect, Has Kay finally opened herself up to others?"

Ais, who was watching the three of them from a place a bit apart, slightly bent her neck.

"It seems to be a bit different from getting along, but, well, I guess it's a good thing for the witches from both clans to become close with each other."

Ais could feel this was the result of ushering in Naga.

Isn't it essential for one to associate with a person of different view and sense of values? Living within a single clan and adhering to one's belief, wouldn't that turn into one's own weakness? Receiving an outsider, holding a conversation and being open-minded toward that person, recently, Ais had been wondering if those points weren't crucial.

(Later, wouldn't we have to form a kinship with people from the outside? If it's mine and Naga-san's child, it will surely be born as a superior witch….. Wha, uwaaa?! Oh dear, just what am I thinking about?!)

Ais forcefully shifted her eyes toward the pile of cobble inside a cage.

(R, R, R, Right now we should prioritize and focus on our counterattack against the Kasandora Kingdom. There's no time for pondering about anything else. No time at all. Calm down, me.)

She took a deep breath.

Ais had been repeatedly doing her throwing practice for days like this. She had become able to throw cobble at a distance further than 270 meters. Not to mention, her aim had improved as well. Still, Ais can't wear any armor due to her having to enhance her body with her magic. Because of that, she would need to wear her usual, thin clothes and have someone stand beside her to repel arrows. On the bright side however, Ais possessed a great offensive ability.

This time, the one in charge of guarding her was Nonoel. As long as she was close to water, Nonoel could keep away the flying arrows with a shield created from a water membrane. Holding a bucket of water in her hands, Nonoel was on a standby next to Ais. She too was wearing ultrathin clothes due to the nature of her magic.

(When I observe their appearances, somehow, it feels like I will lose my interest in this battle, which is troublesome. Nevertheless, it's a nice view)

"Naga, what are you looking at?" Harrigan, who had finished preparing the wooden dolls, approached him.

"While it's the same as usual, I still can't agree on your look, which isn't right for battle."

For Harrigan to move the dolls using her magic, she too had to wear ultrathin garments.

"Metal nullifies our magic, so it's inevitable that we can't put on any armor. By the way, shouldn't it be all the more reason for you to be glad?" "Well, it's just as you say." "I see you've finally become honest, haven't you?"

Harrigan's jet-black, abundant hair floated in the air.

"N, No, it isn't just me? Generally, all men would be happy at that fact? Right, Raibach?"

Raibach, who was on a standby behind Naga, caught a glimpse of Harrigan and

turned away his gaze hurriedly.

“P……Please don’t ask me for an approval.” “Well, I guess I’ll let you go.”

Because Harrigan’s hair fell loosely, they both sighed with relief.

“Speaking of which, it’s fine for us to completely follow according to the plan, right, Naga?” “With the current situation, we should be able to win without any trouble.”

(Without any trouble, you say? As always, this guy is amazingly self-confident.)

“I shall amend the plan and give you new instructions in case something unexpected occurs, but for now, we’ll ambush them as arranged. Harrigan, please assign everyone to their posts.”

Harrigan returned back, so as to convey Naga’s instructions to the rest of her witches.

“Ais, you too should prepare soo…., hey, what are you doing?”

Ais, who became confused, stopped her deep breathing and swung with her opened, right hand.

“Eh? Noooo, I’m not doing anything?” “I understand you might be nervous, but, worry not. This time, we should be able to win without exerting ourselves too much.” “Ah…. yes, that’s….. right.”

Ais wasn’t particularly nervous before the battle, but, since it was difficult and troublesome to explain the reason why she was flustered, Ais made a vague smile and nodded.

“Well then, I guess I will go and take my position as well.” “I’m relying on you. Vita, you too, please be prepared soon.” “Umu, understood. Then, shall we make our last arrangements? Hey, Elysio, let’s go.” “Yes, Mother.”

Seeing off Vita and Elysione leaving his place, Naga faced toward Kay.

“Kay, be on a standby together with the wooden dolls.” “Ah, yes, understood.”

Kay left soon after too.

“Well then.”

Naga looked with a distant view at the main road running from the north to

south. He couldn’t see well, since the road was zigzagging between the hills, but, Naga soon noticed the troops from the Kasandora Kingdom appearing in his view. There were roughly a thousand of them.

On the other hand, Naga’s countering group had a little less than 20 witches, still, he was confident in what he had said before.

(That’s right. There should be no problem as long it’s that many. We should worry about that…… afterwards.)

Naga’s thoughts were already focused on the next battle.

Prologue 2

It was just before Naga and the rest started to prepare for a counter against the troops of Kasandora Kingdom that tried to retrieve the fort.

The royal capital of Kasandora Kingdom. Guiscard rushed into a certain bedroom located deep inside a royal palace.

“Uncle!” “Guiscard, is that you?”

Inside the bright and spacious room, the king, who was stretching out on a large bed near a big window, raised up his body while smiling timidly, and welcomed his nephew, Guiscard.

“Just, what’s wrong with you, uncle?” “The doctor told me not to exert myself, but well….” “Honestly, please pull yourself together.”

There were moments when Guiscard would think it was better to let the king die like that and……. succeed his throne, but there was a fear the kingdom would fall into turmoil, and in the worst case, even crumble. That’s why, he was quite serious in telling Kasandora to pull himself together.

“There doesn’t seem to be anything wrong with my condition, so you don’t have to worry about me. More importantly….”

The voice of the king, which was normally faint, had become even more weak. “Have you, heard about troops gathering in Granvista?” “I happened to overhear that, but, I don’t know its details.” “Is that so? This is a piece of information that has reached me. Looks like it will mean more work for you.” “About those troops, what’s the purpose of them gathering?” “Apparently…. they’re forming an army for the extermination of the witches. The messenger sent by Aiba told me that.”

(Again, it’s that man butting in?)

“Do you mean to say…. they came here to ask us for reinforcements?” “Even if

you say reinforcement, it's just a little bit. That's because they already seem to have as many as three to four thousand of units." "Three to four thousand?!"

Guiscard opened his eyes wide.

Ligaya, who stood on standby behind him, was also astonished.

"And not just that. It looks like that the elite troop of which the Old Church is proud of, the Brigade of 88, has been summoned as well." "For real?"

Both Guiscard and Ligaya jumped up in surprise. It wasn't the sort of situation in which it was necessary to call the Brigade of 88. Not to mention, despite summoning the brigade, it was even more strange to assemble another three to four thousand units.

"I wonder what's the meaning of that. Even though they can easily defeat the witches with that brigade alone, they still have gathered that many soldiers for their extermination group."

"I have no knowledge regarding Aiba's plan, but most likely, our kingdom won't prosper from it."

The king hung his head powerlessly while sitting on his bed.

"I'm at my limit. I've already run out of strength and willpower to overcome even our current problem. Guiscard….. I shall grant you the rights as my representative. Please take care of this kingdom from now on."

(For real?!)

Guiscard was barely able to suppress his joyful look. Shortly after that, he bowed down laudably.

"Yes. I will accept your offer and carry out my work with prudence." "If you can safely overcome this crisis, I shall officially retire and abdicate my throne to you."

It looked like the king was serious about his words. It had been Guiscard's dearest wish to become king since his childhood, however, while he was delighted, he also felt confused at the same time.

Thanks to the death of Guiscard's father, who was the former king, his uncle succeeded the throne, which made him strongly believe that a throne isn't something to be usurped, but something that should be taken back.

That being said, Guiscard didn't intend to usurp the throne from his uncle, as it would do him no good if he was to rule while being branded as a usurper. Suppressing any revolt coming from residents and subordinates, and removing his opponents, it was clear to Guiscard: he would lack the leadership needed to guide the kingdom, were he to usurp.

(I don't have such a capacity to lead.)

Therefore, Guiscard had been steadily gaining more achievements. He continued to do so. And then, he was blessed with good fortune when he assumed the top position of General from Geobalk, as a result of the latter's army suffering a defeat. Even now, Guiscard wouldn't cease to strive, so as to make his uncle acknowledge him. Such was his plan to obtain the throne.

Guiscard wouldn't hesitate to reciprocate if the king decided to remove him, but, in the end, it was just, a reciprocation. He had no intention of raising a revolt against the king. Because of that, even if he decided to obtain the throne, Guiscard wouldn't know what the future would hold for him. However, now that the Kingdom had fallen into crisis, it seemed the king was unable to endure the burden placed on his shoulders.

(It's because of your untactfulness that you grew anxious and reached your limit. You could say you reap what you sow.)

Is what he thought. Guiscard didn't restrain himself when he was told he would be granted the rights to represent the king. However, as one would expect, he couldn't bring himself to hold out his hands and say things like 'I'll accept it gladly'. Instead, he would say 'Please stay strong, uncle. Your power is still indispensable for us.' under pretense of aiding Kasandora. Still, the king shook his head from side to side with a faint smile on his face.

"On one side, there are the witches, whereas, on other side, there's the extermination army. An elderly man, like me, can no longer break this deadlock. What we need is young blood, like you."

What Kasandora said sounded like a mere excuse of dodging his responsibility, but nevertheless, Guiscard didn't feel like criticizing him for that.

"To begin with, the one who had raised this kingdom to its current large size was your father. It probably goes without saying you're the right person to take

over this kingdom.”

(That may be a fair argument, but still…)

“Anyway, we need to solve this crisis first.” “That’s right. I shall pass on the information about you becoming my representative to the other officials. I’m relying on you, Guiscard.”

As soon as he said so, the king threw himself down on the bed powerlessly.

One of the royal court’s hired doctors that stood in the room’s corner stepped forward.

“His Majesty is exhausted right now, so I would advise……”

The doctor urged as if trying to interrupt the meeting. Sensing that it was the right time, Guiscard and Ligaya left the bedroom.

2

Guiscard, who had returned back to his office, tried to knead a future plan despite still being quite confused at the previous turn of events.

Without changing their garments covered in dust, Guiscard and Ligaya sat at a dining table.

Soon after they received wine and cups from a maid, Guiscard ordered her and the rest of his guards to withdraw. Once Ligaya finished pouring the wine into Guiscard’s cup, the latter drank it empty in one go.

“Recently, it’s become quite hectic, hasn’t it?”

Guiscard, who emptied his cup, breathed a sigh.

“Or perhaps, should I say…….. congratulations on becoming the king’s representative?”

At Ligaya who said it with a slight hesitance and confusion, Guiscard replied as if snarling under his nose.

“I’m not sure if I should be happy about that, but well.” “I, guess you are right. The timing couldn’t have been worse though.” “Still, forming an army combined from the neighboring countries at the westmost peninsula isn’t something you could feel at ease about.”

Hearing Guiscard's words, Ligaya put down his cup with a difficult expression.

"If they really planned to just exterminate the witches, then throwing in the Brigade of 88 would be more than enough. Indeed, the witches have become strong, but as expected, it doesn't seem to be something the Brigade of 88 wouldn't be able to cope with alone. Despite that, why did they go through the trouble of borrowing troops from neighboring countries?" "That's the real question. Not to mention, they've gathered a large number of them, which consist of up to four thousand."

Guiscard furrowed his eyebrows, folded his arms, and pondered deeply about something.

Finally, he began to speak abruptly.

"We won't hear any more details on that if we don't ask again for a report, but, apart from that, it doesn't seem we would reach a conclusion…. First, we'll most likely have to inquire about Cardinal Aiba's true intention." Ligaya furrowed his eyebrows a bit and asked.

"Do you think he will be straightforward in his confession?" "Even if he isn't, I'll understand his reply to some degree. We will choose the smartest messenger we have here, who won't just receive Aiba's response, but also judge his attitude." "Understood."

Ligaya bowed down politely.

"Is there anything else you would wish to arrange promptly?" "Just to make sure, we'll be proceeding with preparations for holding the city. Continue to strengthen its defense, and replenish our provisions and army personnel. At the same time, we have to accomplish our plan of taking back Fort Ein." "I wonder if it will go as planned." "Now that the plan is in motion, it's too late to stop it. If we do nothing, we'll give Aiba more pretext to act." "Understood. I'll be taking care of your orders, so please excuse me."

Ligaya bowed down deeply, to the extent of touching the table with his forehead, and left the room. Once he had left, Guiscard became lost in deep thought.

(Upon calling the Brigade of 88, there's no doubt that Aiba is serious about exterminating the witches, but, as one would expect, I can't figure out why he would need to gather as many as four thousand units from neighboring countries.)

Combat groups, also known as 'brigades', which belonged to the Old church, were very well known for their valor. The Brigade of 88 was famed to be the strongest one among them all. Actually, rumor has it there were times where they would also emerge victorious against the witches, even to the extent of annihilating their clans.

(If an elite group, like the Brigade of 88, was to make its appearance, then there should be no need to assemble this many soldiers. Even a single brigade consisting of 500 people should probably be more than enough to help us in retrieving Fort Ein. Despite that, is there some sort of ulterior motive behind that number of troops? That's right, for example,) Isn't Aiba's plan of extermination just a front for them to attack Guiscard and the rest? Isn't it because Kasandora Kingdom fell into disgrace by losing to the witches on the field and having their fort snatched away that Aiba isn't willing to forgive them? Wouldn't attacking Kasandora Kingdom be his way to increase the morale of the extermination army before a bloodbath with the witches? Obviously, what Guiscard feared was a needless worry. While it's true that Aiba could dispose of Kasandora Kingdom, he still hadn't shown any tendency toward that idea. However, it was true that this kingdom would belong to Guiscard sooner or later, now that he had become its king's representative. Such a future outlook made his predictions become sharp, or perhaps, better to say – oversensitive.

Feelings of fear and doubt started to grow inside Guiscard as he was momentarily trapped in his thoughts.

(Despite saying extermination, the fact that the neighboring countries agreed to send in a large number of troops is strange as well. That guy, Aiba, I wonder if he had promised to hand out our territories as a form of reward for those who would give a good account of themselves.)

It didn't look like the Kingdom of Kasandora would be able to defend themselves, were they to be attacked by that many troops. What's more, there was a notable group of five hundred within their troops, the famous Brigade of

Not even the Kingdom of Kasandora, who was in deep distress after suffering two consecutive defeats against the witches, would become a match for them.

(By instigating us to retrieve Ein Fort, are they trying to capture the capital when we're occupied by the witches? I won't forgive such an act.)

After all, Guiscard was closer to assuming the throne, for which he had longed for, for so long. No, he felt he had to achieve that. And also, for the sake of his father's unfulfilled wish, who died from an illness. Later, he had to strengthen the position of the Kasandora Kingdom on the westmost part of the peninsula. If possible, Guiscard wanted to grow the kingdom into a powerful one, capable of subjugating other countries. While he was holding the vision of making the kingdom his own, belief and prospects toward the bright future gushed inside Guiscard.

(I'm nothing like my uncle. I'll be able to overcome this crisis. I shall overcome it and make this kingdom even greater.) However, Guiscard's concrete plan wasn't just about that. Whenever he would think about the throne dangling in front of him, Guiscard felt like he could overcome any hurdle, no matter how troublesome it was.

(I won't let my kingdom to be treaded on by Aiba and those robbers. I'll protect this place at any cost, even if my enemy is to be the Brigade of 88.)

Before one could notice, a flame of a paranoid dwelled inside his eyes. Guiscard's sense of duty to protect his own country would be later recognized by both the witches and the extermination group.

(The only one to fear is the Brigade of 88. Apart from them, there's no need for us to be afraid of that mish-mash of soldiers formed by other countries. Even if our mobilization power has dropped to 1500, as long we force the citizens to arm themselves for a siege, then our garrison should total out to 2000. In that case, even if 4000 of them attacks us, the city won't fall that easily. What's more, that mish-mash won't be able to endure long fights. And finally, their camp seems to be fractioning, just like a comb with missing teeth. When the time comes, perhaps, it should be fine for us to ask for reinforcements from the New Church.)

Asking for assistance from the New Church was, so to speak, forbidden. There would be no turning back if they decided on that move. In the end, Kasandora Kingdom was placed in a situation in which it would either fall into someone else's hand or be destroyed.

There was no way for Guiscard to be able to see that far into the future. The only thing that dominated his feelings right now was the thought of him wanting to protect the kingdom no matter what it takes. The kingdom which he would succeed.

(Well then, let's leave that matter aside and first focus on taking back Fort Ein. Otherwise, nothing will begin. Still, the drop in our mobilization power…… is somehow a pain in the ass.)

On top of being unaware of Naga's eccentric ideas, Guiscard, whose sense was common, was stuck between 2 enemies: the extermination group and the witches.

Afterwards, his trouble would give a rise to a new development, of which neither Aiba, Jeweljude, and of course, Naga, could predict.

Chapter 1-The Eye that Reads the Flow

1

The one to lead the Kasandora Kingdom's army against the witches, so as to retrieve Fort Ein, was Ligaya, to whom one could also refer as Guiscard's right-hand man. Guiscard's career had mainly focused on accounting and management of their army's funds, hence, he had no real battle experience. Besides, if their opponent were the witches, Guiscard thought it would be more reasonable to entrust the skillful Ligaya with that task rather than have himself butt in. Guiscard had also decided he would support Ligaya's back.

"Excellent, we shall set off for a sortie."

At Ligaya's order, the vanguard of their troops began to march. The 1st wave consisted of 300 soldiers. The 2nd wave, which fell under Ligaya's direct command, had 300 soldiers as well. Whereas, the 3rd and last wave consisted of 200 people.

The mentioned 200 people, which comprised of messengers, transportation soldiers and guards, acted as Ligaya's rear that supported his main forces.

Ligaya held no criticism against Guiscard's seemingly cowardly tactic, as it was of utmost importance to assure the safety of Guiscard, who was the general of Kasandora Kingdom's army.

A platoon will fall into commotion upon its leader's death. The same goes for a captain's company and a commander's battalion, as well as for the general of the whole army. Since this was how troops functioned in this era, Ligaya thought it was just natural for Guiscard to stay behind.

(Rather, I should be thankful to General for not expressing his willingness to carry out the attack by himself. The only ones to troubled would be, as usual, soldiers on the frontline.)

There were times when even Ligaya, who possessed plenty of battle experience on the frontline, had to deal with irrational orders from his superiors. Because of that, he warned himself while drawing a conclusion.

Despite that, their enemy this time was the witches. As this was Ligaya's first battle involving the witches, he too felt a bit nervous. The 2nd wave proceeded to its departure after leaving some time gap. And the 3rd wave followed soon after. Ligaya's plan was to make the 3rd wave a reserve troop, with the 1st and 2nd wave being offensive troops. According to those soldiers that escaped from Fort Ein, there were less than 50 witches in total. Because of that, having 600 soldiers on their side, Ligaya should be able to cope with their enemy somehow……. rather, they had to manage it at all cost.

(I really wish there are no more than 50 of them. However, for the witches to be able to capture a fort guarded by 300 soldiers, I wonder if their number is truly less than 50. Naturally, I haven't heard the witches who have been living inside the dark forest to band together against their enemy, but, while I can believe there are around 50 of them, I can't agree with this amount being actually able to bring down such a guarded fort. No…..)

Ligaya recalled their last battle against the witches at the Schweiz River. He wasn't there back then, but he heard from others who happened to be present it had been seemingly a wretchful defeat.

(For our army of 2000 units to suffer an utter defeat like that against a mere 20-30 witches. There's no room for negligence. That's why, we've brought siege engines with us.)

This time, Kasandora Kingdom's plan was to utilize catapults and a battering ram in order to capture the fort. For that reason, their plan of retrieving it took slightly more time, due to preparations involving heavy weaponry. Ligaya felt they were going a little bit overboard with their attack on such a small fort, but nevertheless, the enemy were the witches. He thought they had to do as much as possible. Ligaya, who saddled his horse and took command, ran his eyes over

the surroundings. There were no villages to the south of the royal capital, and the amount of arable land was scarce. Instead, where Ligaya was standing, nothing but wastelands and a forest could be seen appearing on both sides of the main road that stretched from Kasandora to Fort Ein. In front of them, there was a hilly area, which in comparison to a plain, obstructed their long-distance view.

(Perhaps, we should expect an attack from the witches soon.)

It was unclear for Ligaya when, what kind of magic, as well as under what conditions the witches would launch their attack against them, which made him feel anxious. Even after listening to those who survived from previous battles, Ligaya still had no clue. He learned more or less about the enemy's effect and type of magic, such as water, wind, and fire magic, but he couldn't grasp why their troops came under the enemy's attack.

(Could it be that the witches have become able to manipulate and toy with our army? It's the first time for me to hear about this, but….) There were many things that Ligaya had no idea about, such as what the witches' attitude before and after a battle was, as well as their strategy. Despite saying so, they had to fight and win.

(With this fragmentary knowledge that we've obtained, what's left is to entrust our luck to the heavens.)

Ligaya could only become serious.

(Besides, from the witches' unconventional fighting method, there's a chance they will launch a preemptive attack on us.)

Therefore, Ligaya dispatched numerous scouting troops from the 2nd wave, and also from the 3rd wave, which assumed the vanguard position, to look out for any unexpected attacks coming from the witches.

2

“I guess the enemy will be entering our range soon.”

Naga muttered after looking down at the Kasandora army from a high elevation. He was able to make an almost exact estimation of the number and battle formation of their enemy based on the information from Yuuki’s reconnaissance and Selena’s Heaven’s Eyes.

“Everything is going according to the plan.”

Naga believed in the success of his strategy.

The aim of his plan was to defend Fort Ein, still, Naga thought he wanted to carry it out without causing much damage for both sides.

He expressed that intention, as it was one of his principles of war, but according to Yuuki,

“The more of the enemy we kill, the more benefit we gain.”

She said so while being very displeased.

Not just her, many other witches wore the same, or rather, wondering expressions. Still, Naga faced them down.

“Following your method there will be no profit at all.”

Right now, Naga was awaiting the right moment for the 2nd and 3rd group, lead by Raibach, to make their appearances. Whether their plan of establishing a peaceful world would succeed or not, Naga believed it would greatly depend on how many human allies they could gain. They couldn’t rely just on their own strength. “Only that way, can we benefit.” – Still, because the witches weren’t satisfied, Naga had his own way by emphasizing his words. In order to make this plan successful, they had to treat Raibach, who was in charge of the 3rd group, well.

Raibach probably wouldn't be pleased, were he to learn they achieved victory simply because they slaughtered Kasandora Kingdom's soldiers, as many of them were his former comrades. Therefore, Naga wanted to avoid that. But, because the witches wouldn't be content with that, Naga thought it was better not to state his true intentions.

(I guess you should always start with the first step, or rather not, but, there's no telling, some of the witches might consider Raibach a nuisance if they see me appointing him to a responsible post, even though he was just recently a prisoner……. Hm? Always start with the first….. Whose quotation was that again?)

A fragment of his memory from his principles of war resurfaced in the back of his mind, but, Naga decided not to dig any deeper into that.

Anyways, like that, Naga kneaded a plan to repel the enemy's troops while bearing in mind his fundamental policy.

With that, Naga and the witches proceeded to their tactic.

3

A certain mantle was placed inside a shallow, dug hole located close to the main road. As the mantle began to float, the one to appear from it was Elysione.

So as not to be discovered and caught by the enemy, Elysione lowered her back and adopted a crouching position. Because the main road stretched between hilly areas and a mountainous zone, it was natural for the Kasandora Kingdom's army to reach Fort Ein in columns. Naga predicted such a thing would happen, and therefore, considered it in his plan.

"Mother, just a bit more."

Elysione called out to Vita, who was inside the mantle.

"I'm ready at any time." "….4, 3, 2, 1, now!"

Zun – Being unable to endure, Elysione crawled on all fours once she received a shock reaching her stomach.

"*Kuuuu*"

Despite Elysione being used to Vita's magic and preparing herself mentally, she still couldn't bear its effect, as she was unable to put any strength into her limbs while falling flat. Even if one was to try to muster a bit of one's strength, it didn't seem they would be able to move an inch. It was no exception for Elysione, and so, the vanguard from Kasandora's Army's 1st wave, which was taken by surprise, immediately bent their knees, leaned forward and fell on the ground. The range of Vita's magic was more than 300 meters. 20-30 soldiers, who walked in front of the 1st wave's column, fell onto the ground and struggled upon entering Vita's range of magic.

"W, What's going on?!" "Is the enemy attacking?!"

Among the soldiers, there were also a few of those who had been involved in the previous battle at Fort Ein. "This is just like that time!" – Despite those few

thinking so, they had no counterplan nor any idea about how to deal with the situation.

“It’s an attack, from the witches….”

The mentioned soldiers could do nothing but groan with those words. They could not even send instructions to their allies.

The soldiers in the rear readied their spears and bows hurriedly while bracing themselves for the attack. Still, the enemy was nowhere to be found. Nobody seemed to have noticed Elysione and Vita hiding themselves in a crouching position, inside a dug hole located hundreds of meters ahead of them.

Thinking it was an attack commenced by the witches, those who had directly witnessed the abnormal situation were seized with fear. Despite only 20-30 people in front of the 1st wave collapsing, it was enough to stop the soldiers who followed behind.

“What happened?!” “Why did the front suddenly stop?!”

Not being affected by Vita’s magic, and in addition, not seeing their enemy, those from behind had not the slightest idea why the soldiers in front had stopped. Had it been a pillar made of fire blowing up, they would’ve been able to grasp the situation even from far away, but, those unaffected by Vita’s magic had yet to experience it in order to realize the gravity of the situation. Nevertheless, it was clear to them something was occurring, and hence, commanding officers of other following troops dispatched messengers to check the situation in front.

Just then, something flew through the air while cutting it.

Boom!

The thing sank into the ground and created dust, at the same time producing the loud sound of an impact.

“A, A cobble?”

Other cobbles followed up, creating more dust each time they hit the ground with a loud sound of an impact.

Unlike before, everyone had realized it was an attack this time. They could experience it on their skin. Still, they became petrified upon learning they were targeted.

Ais was throwing and aiming from the side. Her target was those who were outside the scope of Vita’s magic. The distance between her and the enemy was long, making it difficult for Ais to aim precisely. But, because the soldiers were too scared to move, there was no real need for her to aim whatsoever. It was fine as long the cobbles could reach near soldiers.

Those who were unlucky would be hit by one of the rebounding cobbles. They would lose their consciousness once they got hit in their helmet. Reversely, the cobbles would bounce off if they hit their armor, depending on the degree of the impact, but, if the soldiers got hit numerous times, it was quite likely their armor would break and their body, pierced. In case of their legs and arms, they would become fractured. Were the situation to continue like that, the troops from Kasandora would sustain nothing but heavy injuries due to Ais’ tremendous strength. In the worst case scenario, the soldiers would pass away. Thinking that way, perhaps their bodies felt heavy, but, they couldn’t afford to lie down there. Trying to stand up, many of them began to fight against heavy odds.

Soon after, their bodies turned rapidly light. Those who had noticed that jumped up one after another. As one would expect, they ran away at full speed amidst the clouds of dust, behind other troops.

The soldiers crossed with those trying to advance forward, as a result, creating a commotion among other troops.

“Oi, what the heck?!” “Return back to your position!” “Did something

happen?!

A certain leader together with his men at the back tried to hold back those escaping, but, the latter wouldn't stop to move.

"The witches are striking!" "If you go ahead of you, you won't be able to move! "Once you're immobilized, you will be targeted with cobbles!"

Actually, Kasandora Kingdom's troops weren't the target of the shots. Not even the accuracy of those shots was precise. Nonetheless, watching cobbles falling closely near them while being immobilized was what overwhelmed their feelings with fear. They were convinced that the cobbles would surely hit them if they stayed down. For that reason also, nobody tried to move. The very same terror spread among other peers who stood behind. Many of the present soldiers had already gone through a bitter experience at the Schweiz river, and even those that fought against the witches back then at Fort Ein. At that time, they were immobilized in the same way and lost their consciousness from being electrocuted by lightning. The soldiers who were part of the garrison at Fort Ein turned around and fled away as if trying to catch up with their other comrades, upon recalling the previous event.

"Hey, where are you going?!" "Stop! Return back to your post!"

The leaders of various platoons were shouting desperately, but, far from the commotion settling down, it further escalated to the back of the end of the 1st wave.

Bang! – Again, a strong impact could be felt reverberating in one's stomach, however, this time it was the leaders and their subordinates turn to fall, or perhaps, better to say, tumble clumsily.

"Uwaaah, it's again here!"

Having their paths blocked by the leaders, the soldiers who had pushed and shoved each other collapsed onto the ground while screaming. Elysione, who had seen the 1st wave's front crumbling and being unable to fight back, moved to the next mantle and again repeated the same action using Vita's 'Song of Gravity'.

Just as planned, Ais changed her position and again commenced her throwing.

Following that, Yuuki, who was watching the commotion from above, landed on her hoverboard. One of Sraymeyer's members, Lily, rode it with her. Having a desperate expression, the petite Lily clung to Yuuki's body as they soared into the sky. She casted her fearsome magic and caused a storm with lightning.

Dozens of lightning bolts rained down from the sky while aiming at the soldiers that moved in confusion. As well as for Lily, there was no particular need to specify her aim. Since the soldiers had been wearing armor and holding swords and spears, they were struck by lightning one after another.

The commotion among Kasandora Kingdom's troops continued to escalate more and more.

Just then, a crowd of wooden dolls that followed Kay was approaching. To the soldiers, the witch who was half naked with her skin radiating in silver appeared as though she was leading the crowd of dolls. The dolls made from short logs and thin limbs carried bows with them while swinging their body left and right soundlessly. It was a somewhat bizarre view. Not to mention, in addition to the incessantly thrown cobbles, there were also lightning bolts showering the enemy's heads.

The vanguard from the 1st wave of soldiers was just one step away from falling into a complete state of panic.

"Uwaaaaaaaaah!" "Mommyyyyyyy!" "Please save me!"

The platoon leaders had finally come to realize their own mistakes by trying to stop those fleeing. However, it was already too late, as their bodies turned multiple times heavier, making them unable to move with ease.

Soon, the surrounding ground was buried with soldiers who struggled desperately while tumbling.

"It's the witches!" "We're being attacked by the witches!" "Save mee!"

Those soldiers that escaped first to the back cut through the 1st wave and ran til the middle of the 2nd wave.

The 2nd wave also started to lose its composure upon hearing from the fleeing soldiers they were under attack of the witches. Despite company captains giving out orders to advance, so as to support their allies and repel the witches, almost

half of the present soldiers watched the turn of event without moving.

In the end, there were those trying to follow the orders, those hesitating to progress, and those running away from the 1st wave. The last ones mixed up with the 2nd wave, making another commotion.

Finally, the commotion kept spreading til the middle of the 2nd wave.

(Damn. What the heck is going on?!)

Ligaya had not the slightest idea about what was going on. The only thing he could grasp was that his troops had already started to crumble after the first clash with their enemy.

(Is this how the witches fight? It's as though we're being toyed with by them. I don't get it. For the witches who had been passive til now, how are they able to fight like this?! Doesn't it feel like there's some sort of eminent leader guiding a troop of elites?)

It was an excellent preemptive attack, which far exceeded even Ligaya's expectations. He felt like nodding and agreeing with the reason why General Geobalk, who had served long in military service, had stained his reputation with a single loss.

(No good! This isn't the time to think about that. If I don't rearrange the formation, we'll lose at this rate.)

Ligaya, who was at the rear of the 2nd wave which he led, became desperate and moved forward. He shouted at other commanding officers and continued to spur on the soldiers, in order to suppress the whole turmoil.

4

Seeing how the turmoil escalated among the 1st wave, Vita released her magic. As she did so, those who were groveling regained their mobility. At the same time, feeling how their bodies lightened, the soldiers jumped up hurriedly and turned away.

The cobbles which had been incessantly coming from the side wouldn't stop. Every time they crashed into the ground, clouds of dust would continue to rise. Nobody from Kasandora Kingdom's troops could afford to lie down on the ground forever, as they would have their bodies pierced through if they did so.

Since the only one to throw the cobbles was Ais, there wasn't a large number of them like when it was an all out barrage, still, it was the case for lightning striking from the sky. The individual lightning strikes weren't that strong, and even being hit by one of them directly wouldn't be life threatening, however, the target would lose consciousness, were it to be serious.

On one side, there were soldiers groaning and tumbling on the floor from being hit by cobbles, whereas, on the other side, there were those suffering spasm from getting struck by lightning. The field was mostly dominated by those scenes. Still, it didn't end with just them. Arrows were flying through the air from the direction of the wooden dolls that had approached near the enemy. The density of the arrows corresponded to the number dolls, which exceeded more than 60, and was similar to the number of items thrown out during an explosive barrage. Since the attack was conducted by the dolls, their shots weren't a big deal, but, Kasandora's troops wouldn't know about that. They would consider the dolls' strike on a par with those terrifically strong throws carried out by Ais.

Feeling they were risking their lives, nobody from soldiers would try to advance or fight back against the witches.

It was just a natural course of action for the soldiers to turn away and flee. The

commotion spread throughout the entire 1st wave and it was no longer possible for the soldiers to settle down and refrain from escaping. The number of defectors was about to increase even further once the previous ones screamed about the terror of the witches' magic, such as the one that made your body turn heavy.

Many of them that had yet to experience Vita's magic began to think they would become her magic's prey, were they to stay there any longer. Nonetheless, among unaffected soldiers, there were also those brave enough to put a resistance against the witches. They directed their bows toward the crowd of wooden dolls and shot. Still, the dolls wouldn't cease to move with just 1 or 2 hits.

"It's their front! Aim at the witch in front! If you take it down, those dolls will cease moving!"

At a leader's order, several people focused their arrows on Kay. Nevertheless, no matter how many times the arrows hit her, they would just bounce back.

The enemy would still be able to comprehend, if she wore thick armor, but, the witch was half naked, no matter how much they looked at her. Even if they aimed at her bare skin, the arrows wouldn't pierce through.

kin kin – metallic sounds were produced together with the arrows bouncing back.

If the arrows proved to be useless, the only thing soldiers could do was to slice their enemy, nonetheless, not even those who happened to be brave enough had the courage to approach the dolls and Kay amidst the rain of arrows and flying cobbles.

Having witnessed the might and Vita's magic, the terror of Ais' throws and Lily's lightning attack, everyone from the 1st wave got cold feet and began to withdraw one by one. However, what waited for them ahead of their path was a new assault, which one could say was intended to stop the enemy.

A herd of wolves plunged into Kasandora Kingdom's 1st wave. The wolves, which gave out threatening sounds of growls, ran freely between the enemy's legs, making them become filled with fear. Even though the animals were controlled by Harlequin, she didn't tell them to bite their enemy to death. The

girl only ordered the wolves to run between soldiers' legs, but that alone had an immediate effect. The enemy's horses acted violently upon sensing the smell of the wolves, which they feared the most.

The horses left the battlefield one after another, either shaking off their owners or with them in tow. There was no end to the commotion.

Finally, not being able to maintain its formation, Kasandora's 1st wave began to retreat. Because the 1st wave turned back, the 2nd wave fell into an even bigger commotion. There were also soldiers who got the wrong idea about their comrades taking flight due to the latter's 1st wave being obliterated. As a result, they would imagine the witches closing in immediately after that. The soldiers threw away their post and began to escape in quick succession from fear.

"Stop! Calm down! The witches still haven't made their appearance! Maintain your formation!"

Ligaya tried to hold back the staff officers together with their soldiers and advance forward with the 2nd wave. Nonetheless, the situation only worsened.

"Our bodies turn heavy and we can't move!" "There are cobbles flying at us!" "Not to mention, even human-sized rocks!" "There's that witch in the sky who sends lightning bolts at us!" "A crowd of dolls is coming this way!" "A witch in front of that crowd is made from metal!" "Rather than a witch, isn't it a magic-created doll too? "A big herd of man-eating wolves has attacked us. Our comrades are being eaten alive!"

Such words were shouted from mouths of the soldiers who tried to escape. However, alongside the fragmentary information, there were groundless rumors mixed in as well, making the whole situation hard to grasp.

At this rate, it would mean those running away crossing swords with the side that tried to hold them back. Ligaya, who feared that, could only continue with their tactic. He had to avoid increasing the casualty count any more, at all costs, otherwise, the Kasandora Kingdom would become unable to keep their military structure. And once their army ceased to function, the kingdom's very existence would be in danger.

"For now, we will retreat to General Guiscard, who is waiting on standby at the main camp. Rearrange the formation and bring back the defectors by grabbing

their attention!”

The staff officers, who stood near Ligaya, conveyed his order to other troops with a loud voice.

(We are saved!)

Both the soldiers who were trying to flee and those trying to stay felt relief upon hearing the order. They ran towards the main camp while striving to be first.

Once Ligaya had dispatched a messenger to Guiscard, he and his confidants remained at their spots and continued to scream out the order while watching their troops running toward the main camp.

5

Guiscard became shocked upon hearing the content of Ligaya's report, which he had received from his messenger.

The general immediately recalled Kasandora Kingdom's major loss, the one it had suffered from the previous battle at the Schweiz River, and shuddered.

"What's the number of casualties? Is Ligaya safe?!" "The extent of the damage isn't thought to be that serious. Ligaya-sama decided to stay on the battlefield and lead the retreat of the troops." "Is that so?"

Guiscard sighed with relief, however, he remembered it wasn't the right time to rest assured.

"Gather back all the soldiers who have withdrawn!"

Guiscard passed such an order to the other staff officers.

Watching how the staff officers came alive in a hurry, the general smacked his lips and grinded his teeth while cursing inwardly.

(Still, I didn't know the witches would be this strong! Just what the heck is going on?! Haven't they been doing nothing but protecting the black forest till now?)

'That's not what was promised!' – Guiscard wanted to complain, but because he didn't know to whom he should direct his words, he gave up on that idea.

If someone like Ligaya, with his firm tactics, was unable to win, then one could only think the witches had won. [TN: you don't say…]

(Will the witches who are on a roll charge at us? Should we also withdraw from the main camp while it's not too late? No, that won't do. At least, we'll have to wait til all the defectors are gathered back. There's a fear the defectors will scatter somewhere and never return if they don't find our main camp.)

The general had some sense left telling him not to retreat his troops from the main camp.

Guiscard's senior aide returned back to the main camp.

"General, it's been confirmed that there was no major loss to our troops. What should we do?"

In other words, the aide asked Guiscard whether or not they should fight again once they had managed to gather all their troops.

"Gather the soldiers and check them for any wounds. Once you finish, wait here on a standby til Ligaya comes back. "Yes. We will confirm the soldiers' condition and await Ligaya-sama's return." "When Ligaya comes back,"

Guiscard took a glimpse in front of him. What he saw there were his soldiers still running back in succession.

The senior aide waited for Guiscard's next words.

"We shall retreat back to the royal capital."

(I think this is the most reasonable choice.)

The aide stroked his chest in relief after hearing they wouldn't have to advance on the witches once more.

(It's good to have a sensible General, like Guiscard-sama.)

The reason why Guiscard wasn't stubborn and haughty about forcing his troops was perhaps due to him previously walking the path of a career accountant, which made his decisions rational. The senior aide was thankful to Guiscard for not launching a suicidal attack. Most likely, the general himself thought that way.

(Still, by just making this reasonable decision, we won't be able to overcome our crisis, probably.)

The aide had also made such a prediction. Despite that, there was little he could do.

He, who was Ligaya's subordinate, would occasionally, like this time, serve as Guiscard's aide, but not as someone who would be able to come up with a plan

to break the deadlock. Even if the aide was able to carry out his orders devotedly and effectively, he couldn't afford to pull his superior's leg with his ideas. That's why, it was fine for him to just fulfil his duty as a soldier.

And then, looking at the general, Guiscard had his weak points too. While he most likely had the ability to manage a country during peace, it was quite uncertain whether or not he could get through hectic times.

(I wonder what's going to happen next. Well, I guess only time will tell, but…)

Suppressing the feeling of hopelessness that gushed inside of him, the aide paid his respect to Guiscard.)

"Yes. We shall await Ligaya-sama's return, and then, head back toward the royal capital." "Anyways, bring the soldiers back together. If any of them tries to desert, you may even slice them up." "Yes. We will hold back the soldiers even if it means for us to slice them up!" "Excellent, now go!"

Turning around and moving his sight away from the aide, Guiscard looked again towards the southern direction.

Guiscard was a bit surprised at himself for being able to calmly watch how the soldiers continued to disperse.

(So the real problem is we don't know what the witches are going to do…. next?)

The messenger sent by Ligaya claimed that 1 or 2 of the witches had shown themselves. Despite there being just 1 or 2 of them, as many as 600 units were quickly repelled and made to flee.

(I see. So it wasn't impossible for General Geobalk, who had served long in military service, to be defeated as well.)

Guiscard also shared a similar feeling with Ligaya, but, it was only til they faced the witches for the first time that they understood the rumor about Geobalk was true.

(Despite that, why did the witches suddenly become this strong? I don't understand it at all. Could it be, that someone powerful enough to govern the witches has made their appearance? Like the rumored King of the Witches? If

that’s true….)

It’s useless to fight the witches any further. – Is what Guiscard thought about absentmindedly.

6

“They’re running away!”

Kay, who stood in front of the dolls, jumped up and down. “Yahooo, we did it! We forced back the enemy! We were able to ward them off even without letting them approach the fort!”

As she was doing so, Ais ran down a hill from the right side.

Behind Ais, there were Ixine riding on her horse and Nonoel clinging to her following after. If the enemy soldiers had responded back with their bows, Nonoel would have had to protect Ais using her water-made shields. In the end, not receiving any attack from the enemy, Ais didn’t even have the chance to flourish.

“Oh, Ais, thank you for your hard work!” “Kay-chan, you did a great job too!” “Ah no, I was just standing all the time, you see.”

Kay put a wry smile on her face and looked down at her body.

“The enemy thought it was creepy, since they couldn’t pierce through Kay with their arrows. That’s why, I would wonder if the creepy Kay-chan didn’t play a big part in our plan.” “Ehh? Ais, it doesn’t feel like you’re praising me.”

Kay puffed her cheeks out in unhappiness. Just then, Yuuki descended on her hoverboard. The petite Lily jumped off the board upon its landing.

“Lily! You did well too!”

As soon as Kay waved with her hand, Lily responded back by waving. “Ah… I’m honestly beaten. I’ve never casted my magic from a hoverboard, so it was very difficult for me to concentrate.” “The same goes for me. I rarely give a ride to anyone for this long, so it’s not just you who’s tired, you know?” “Ah, that’s right. Well, aren’t you fine anyway, Yuuki?” “Why am I the one to be fine?! I had to pay twice as much attention so as not to get hit by arrows. Seriously, don’t

consider me as an exception!”

“Ah… I got it, I got it. Thanks for your hard work!”

Kay bowed down in an apologetic way, but, Yuuki wouldn’t stop getting cocky.

“It’s okay, as long as you can understand.”

Lily chuckled back. At that time, Elysione and Vita joined up with their group, and then finally, Harrigan, Naga, Raibach, and the rest arrived together.

“Is it fine for us….. to consider this repulsion successful?

At Harrigan’s question, Naga folded his arms and looked in front of him.

“I guess that’s okay. We managed to win against Kasandora Kingdom’s army three times.” “Yahoooo!”

The witches raised voices of joy, pressed their hands together and sprung up.

“Still, I was surprised to learn it went better than what we had anticipated.”

Once Vita said so with an admiring face, Ais agreed with her and carried on.

“I thought we would have to hole up inside the fort at the very least, but, we were able to ward the enemy off far away from the fort.” “Good grief. Naga, just how skillful are you in battles?”

No no – Naga shook his hand in front of everyone.

“Honestly, it’s not like I’m particularly good in battles. The reason why we won was because the flow of the battle had already been decided, and it was fine for us to simply follow it.” “You mean it?”

Vita was still unconvinced, but, Naga continued speaking in a casual manner.

“For example, if among Kasandora’s troops there were those who had gone through a painful experience during the last 2 battles, just a single attack from you would be enough to scare them off. These people would be ready to run away immediately. Any troop that consist of many of them would become fragile. That’s why, if we carried out an attack similar to before, no, or rather, it’s because our attack was exactly the same as the ones before, that we yielded a great result. Even though the extent of the damage suffered by the enemy wasn’t big, it was enough to make them lose their composure. As long we

continue to press them, their troops will crumble and fall into chaos. ” “I think I can see your point in that explanation of yours, but, the whole plan wasn’t something you could easily pull off. To begin with, it’s impossible for us to see through that flow of the battle that you had mentioned. It may be natural for you who excels in battles, but, not for us who are still inexperienced, you know?”

Bending her neck, Vita looked at Raibach.

“What’s your opinion on that, Raibach?” “Ah, no. I also think that Naga-sama’s highly experienced. The fact he can see the previously mentioned ‘flow of battle’ would also prove that, or perhaps, you should call it the ability to grasp a chance? Being able to exact such precise instructions, not even generals from Kasandora Kingdom would be a match for Naga-sama, even if they were to form a group.”

“Vita, Raibach, even if you praise me, there will be no gains. We should be focusing on the present, you see.” “‘On the present’? What do you mean?”

Harrigan threw a question from aside.

“Sooner or later, we ought to reward everyone properly, is what I mean. Obviously, if the number of our members will increase from now on, I’ll have to add conditions, but….” “Oh, is that so?” “Well, let’s leave that aside. What we should do now is—-” “We already know that, Naga-san!”

Kay suddenly put up her thumb at Naga and replied.

“Of course, you mean holding a banquet, right?!” “That’s wrong!” “Eh? That’s not it? So we aren’t going to hold another, banquet this time? “No, we will, but you see, it’s still too early for that. Did the enemy really withdraw? Can we already cease thinking they might attack us again? First we need to confirm that, and then, we hold a banquet.” “Ah…. you mean it? I guess you’re right.”

Kay scratched her head shyly. Once she did so, Ais interjected.

“It can’t be helped, since Kay-chan thinks about nothing but banquets all year round.” “Ais, that’s mean!”

Laughter burst out among other witches. Filled with optimism and relief about the fact they had managed to protect Ein Fort, everyone’s faces were radiating.

“Well then, Yuuki, you’ve done a great job, but I’d like for you to scout once again. I believe the enemy has already fallen into too much disorder to attack us again, but still, please continue to keep an eye on them.” “You don’t have to tell me that. Then, I shall be going now.”

As soon as Yuuki finished chanting and jumped on her hoverboard, the board gently lifted up in the air together with a wind vortex surrounding it.

The hoverboard soared quickly into the sky and stopped momentarily there; however, it then immediately started to glide through the air.

Within a blink of an eye, Yuuki’s appearance vanished from everyone’s sight.

“Selena.”

A single young witch stepped forward from the rest.

“Can you walk around and check the current situation using your Heaven’s Eyes?” “Understood.” “Kay, Nonoel, and Cu will assist Selena as her bodyguards.” “UnderstoodDarkdhaos (talk)” “Yes.” “Will do.”

“Excellent. The rest of you will go and check on the soldiers who fell behind. If any of them got injured, provide them with first aid. In case there are those with bone fractures, it should be fine if you use a wooden support to attach to their limbs. That’s because their troops will come to retrieve them later.” “Understood.”

Naga called out to the witches who were about to get going.

“Ah, by the way, if there are people who had lost their consciousness, apply treatment to them after waking them up. We need to let them know that the witches are the ones who helped them. This is an important thing.”

The witches responded back affirmatively, divided into groups and scattered to check for any casualties.

“Thank you very much, Naga-sama.”

Raibach, who stood next to him, expressed his gratitude with a small voice.

“Don’t fret. I did so in order to change the bad image of the witches and increase their reputation. It’s not like I would care about your former allies.

Despite Naga saying so, Raibach still bowed down lightly toward him.

“It may be true, but still, allow me to express my gratitude.” “I won’t stop you in doing so, but well….”

Naga laughed and shifted his sight toward Harrigan and Vita, who remained there.

“The problem is, we still don’t what Kasandora Kingdom plans to do next.”

“Will they attempt to capture this fort once more?”

Harrigan asked.

“I don’t think they have any spare power left, but, they might go through the trouble of borrowing men from other countries. What’s your opinion on that?”

Naga looked in turn at Raibach, Harrigan, and Vita’s faces.

“I wonder. I think it’s unlikely for that to happen.”

Harrigan, who replied that way, directed her sight toward Raibach.

“Indeed. Thinking back, Kasandora Kingdom had rarely asked for any reinforcements from other countries, so it’s hard to imagine.”

Saying so, Vita and Naga moved their eyes towards Raibach. Feeling a pressure coming from their gazes, Raibach drew back unintentionally.

(That’s some incredible pressure coming from those three when being stared at by them)

“What do you mean, Raibach?” “T, That’s right. I…..I believe Kasandora Kingdom would like to avoid borrowing any power from other countries.” “Is that so? If that’s true, then, that will buy us some time. Shall we move forward with the preparations for establishing the new country at once and check Kasandora Kingdom’s internal condition?”

“Are you talking about the infiltration and surveillance of Kasandora Kingdom you had mentioned before?”

Once Harrigan questioned on that, Naga nodded down and said ‘That’s right.’

“As one would expect, it’s necessary for us to grasp the current state of the kingdom. If we can manage to do so, it will be easier for us to read their

movements by the next time. Nonetheless, true, perhaps it's better for us to increase the size of the group designated for that surveillance a little."

"What are you thinking about?" "This is just in case, you see. Well, we have yet to talk about that, so for now, there's something else we ought to do." "Hm? What could it be?"

"Oi oi, didn't Kay just mention it? We went through the trouble of pushing back the army of Kasandora. You don't mean to say we aren't going to hold a victory banquet, do you? "Is that so? I guess, you're right. Still, I've got the feeling we've been doing nothing but victory banquets recently." "Don't be like that, Harrigan. The banquets are the proof of our consecutive victories, so shouldn't you be glad?" "It's…. just as you have said Vita, but, should you say I'm perplexed, since I'm not used to winning, or so." "You're pathetic, Harrigan. You should follow Kay's example." "No, if I were to do so, our clan wouldn't last that long." "I think you've just said something rude there." "Then, shouldn't you listen to what Elysione has to offer?" "I shall decline that idea without even considering it first."

Harrigan became dumbfounded.

"I wonder which of us is being more cruel." "Well, isn't it okay? Today, let's celebrate the victory to our heart's content."

At Naga, who was laughing while saying so, both heads of their clans nodded deeply.

"I've no objections." "Same here." 7

Finally, the witches who were in charge of treating the wounded soldiers finished their work and gathered back at where Naga and the rest had been waiting for Yuuki and Selena to return. According to Ais, there were several men who were heavily wounded. Were they to be left like that, they would probably die before their allies could even arrive.

"It can't be helped. Should we put them on the cart and treat them when we return back to Fort Ein? After that, we shall release those people, I guess." "Understood. I'll arrange for that to be carried out immediately."

Just then, Selena, Kay, Nonoel, and Cu returned back as if changing their place

with Ais.

“There was no sign of the enemy to be found in the surroundings.” “Selena, you did quite a work there, didn’t you?”

At Naga’s praise, Selena shook her head from side to side intensely and answered: “Ah, no, I haven’t done anything in particular. It’s okay.” Praise me too, praise me too! – Kay pointed at herself as if asking for that.

“That’s right. Kay and Nonoel worked hard too.” “For some reason, it sounded half-hearted.” “I think it was half-hearted.” “Naga-san’s words were quite shallow.”

Being criticized by those 3 girls, Naga made a wry smile.

“That’s not true. I’m thankful for what you did from the bottom of my heart.” “I wonder about that.”

Kay looked at Naga with her scornful eyes, and then pulled her head back.

“More importantly, now that the enemy has retreated, it’ll soon be time for what you’ve been waiting for, the victory banquet.” “Umm, no? Everyone’s been waiting and not just me?” “Well then, shall go with that?” “Naga-san, you’re mean!”

Kay bent backward, whereas, Nonoel and Selena chuckled.

In the end, Yuuki returned. Based on her information, the enemy retreated back to the royal capital, leaving only a few scouts behind for surveillance. Upon learning that, voices of joy rose up among the witches.

“Excellent! With this, Kay’s long awaited banquet can begin. Everyone, let’s head back to the fort!” “Ohhhhhhhh!”

All the witches made an ardent shout of victory, except for Kay.

“That~is~why don’t say it like I’m the only one who’s waiting…….”

Kay didn’t try to hide her discontented expression.

Chapter 2-Coincidence or Inevitability

1

Just to make sure the enemy doesn't attack, Naga left Ixine, Selena, and Elysione behind to keep watch, and then, returned back with others to Fort Ein. The reason for that was because Selena's Heaven's Eyes would be the fastest way to detect an approaching enemy. Ixine's horse riding skill was good enough for her to be placed first or second among the witches in regards to horsemanship, whereas, Elysione could teleport instantly in case of emergency. Because of that, Naga appointed those two to protect Selena.

Once they returned home, the witches held a victory banquet after preparing grape wine and simple snacks.

2

There wasn’t much wine inside the fort. What’s more, Naga and the rest had only recently captured the fort, so the witches had no time to carry in that much wine. Therefore, nobody could get heavily drunk. However, Naga felt relieved as they were able to prevent Ais from getting violent, as a result of getting drunk.

The witches drank, ate, and danced lively. Since none of them was able to get drunk, no witches would dance naked this time.

Sitting on the wooden floor, in the corner of a spacious room inside a residential building, Naga was eating snacks and tasting wine while starting at the dancing witches.

Next to him, there was Raibach. As usual, the witches were dancing in their ultrathin and small clothes. Apart from those dancing, there were also those that played flutes and drums, however, the fact that all of them were wearing little clothing wouldn’t change.

“As usual, these are some terrific scenes.”

Raibach said in a whispering manner.

“Aren’t they wearing even more risqué clothes than those female dancers from an itinerant group? With such dancing and jumping, they would become fine dancers, I’d say.” “Well, for them, it’s the usual thi….. no…. hm?”

Naga faced toward Raibach.

“What did you just say?” “Yes? No, that’s why I said they’re wearing risqué clothes….” “After that.” “Ummm…. you mean that they’re wearing even more risqué clothes than those female dancers?” “That’s it!”

“Eh? What about that?”

Not replying to Raibach, who asked suspiciously, Naga stared back with a passionate look at the dancing witches.

“What’s that? Aren’t you gazing at them quite intensely?”

Vita, who held her wine cup, approached them with a slight stagger. As one would expect, Harrigan was next to her as well, holding her wine cup.

(As usual, these two look like parent and child when standing next to each other.)

– Is what Naga’s impression was toward these two. Nevertheless, he wouldn’t let them know by any means.

Naga replied with a feigned ignorance.

“Well, I’ve just hit upon something, you see.” “We won’t undress? No matter how passionately you stare at us, we aren’t going to undress, you know?” “Nobody said so, Harrigan.” “Even if you don’t say it, I can understand from your eyes telling us to undress.” “No, I ‘m not!” “Then, what were you going to tell us?” “I was told by Raibach your clothes look even more risqué than those of female dancers. And then, I was struck with an idea.”

Because Harrigan and Vita glared at Raibach, the latter shook his head from side to side firmly.

“So, what idea has come into your mind?”

Harrigan, who shifted her eyes back, asked Naga.

“Wouldn’t it be a good idea to have you dress up as female dancers when infiltrating the city for information?” “Oh?” “Oh!”

Both Harrigan and Vita opened their eyes widely and clapped their hands.

Raibach also looked at Naga with an astonished face.

“At first, I had thought it would be better to form a caravan of merchants and sneak in, but, neither I nor you have traded with anyone before.” “……We haven’t.” “I guess, we also haven’t used any money recently.” “Despite saying so, wouldn’t it be impossible for us to visit that place merely as a group travelers during these hectic times?” “Certainly, it isn’t the kind of place you could visit for no reason.” “Still, wouldn’t it work if we were a group of itinerant entertainers from far away? It wouldn’t be strange for us to say we came there to make a name for ourselves, since we know nothing about that place and its locals. Not

to mention, there would be a reason as to why you are dressed as female dancers. On top of being a group of young beauties, you would also dance and look like female dancers. From what I can see, aren't you pretty skillful in both dancing and playing instruments?" "Let me see, a group of young beauties? Indeed, Naga is a straight person."

(Mother is in high spirits.)

(As long she can lighten herself with that magic, even rising high is an easy thing for her, righttt?) As soon as Dora and Lily put their heads together and whispered to each other,

"Is there something you want to say? Dora? Lily? How about you tell me?" "There's nothing?" "Nothing at allll." "Well, whether all of us are young or not, let's leave that aside."

Once Harrigan said so, Vita directed a stern look at her. However, before Vita could say anything, Kay cut in.

"I guess Hari-nee, too, is sensitive when it comes to talking about age."

'Kyahaha' – Yuuki clapped her hands and laughed, whereas, Vita nodded down deeply while saying. 'True, true'.

"Hey there, don't laugh! And you too, don't agree!"

Harrigan, who had snapped, pointed at Vita and Yuuki while retorting.

And then, Ais butted in while laughing.

"That's right, Kay-chan. It's no good if you talk about Ane-sama as if she's a middle-aged woman." (((Uwa, Ais is being the cruelest one here.)))

The witches in the background threw their heads back profoundly.

"Heh? Kay, so this is how you regards me?" "I-I-I don't? Speaking of which, I haven't mentioned such thing at all, right?"

Bending her legs while shivering, Kay put her hands in front of Harrigan.

"Wanna try and see if you can stop my hair blow?"

Harrigan's abundant bluish black hair floated in the air and turned into a big mallet.

“If I receive Hari-nee’s blow, my insides are going to break. I, even if I can harden my skin, it’s not like my insides will remain intact, so…” “That’s okay. You’ll be able to endure my attack.”

Harrigan’s mallet shaped hair began to swing above Kay’s head.

“Waiiiiiiii, please, somebody save meeee!” “Kay, do your best, okay?” “This what you get when poking into somebody else’s problem!” “Do your best, Kay. Don’t lose, Kay!” “Yuuki, don’t cheer me on!”

Kay looked around for a help, but,

“Lela?! Nonoel?! Cu?! Why are you averting your eyes?! Harlequin, don’t say things like ‘go away’!”

(Ah…. good grief. Like always, it won’t stop once our conversation goes off topic)

‘It can’t be helped.’ – Naga thought so and stood up.

“This much should be enough for your family dissension. Harrigan, let’s hasten with a progressive talk.” “Y….Yes?”

As soon as Harrigan came back to her senses, her hair, which floated above her head, dangled gently.

“What’s a progressive talk?” “That’s why, I’m telling you we need to infiltrate the royal capital and acquire information on Kasandora Kingdom’s state of affairs. There’s a heap of things we need to decide on, in advance, such as, whom we should choose for this trip, from where we should enter and what dance should we decide on. There might be many of them, but, our future will depend on the enemy’s actions from now on, so you could say our role this time is very important. Somehow, we need to find out more about our them.” “Um….. I guess you’re right. Understood….” “Then, we shall discuss in more detail about our group that will set off once the banquet settles down.”

Harrigan breathed a sigh and looked around at everyone.

“Shall we end the banquet soon and began with our talk?”

‘That’s true.’ – Ais nodded.

“Not to mention, we’re already running out of wine and snacks this time, so all

the more the reason to.” “You bet. It’s not the right time for a drinking bout when we’re more concerned about Kasandora Kingdom’s army possibly striking again.”

(Still, you were able to drink casually, weren’t you?)

“Is there something you want to tell us, Naga? Why not speak your mind?” “No, not like there’s anything in particular.”

The moment Naga denied while averting his eyes, he looked around at all present.

“Then, shall we hold a strategic meeting?”

Following his words, the witches brought out folding stools.

Naga sat on his folding stool with his back leaning against the wall, whereas, the witches and Raibach took up their positions as if surrounding Naga in a half-circle.

3

“First, there’s something I’d like to ask you, Raibach, but…”

Naga started their conversation.

“Itinerant entertainers aren’t that uncommon here, right?” “I think so. Depending on their size, there are large and small groups, but, they come to the city relatively often. Those groups won’t just bring out their female dancers, but also do stunts and acrobatics. There are also instances in which they will display their swordsmanship and archery.”

“Do you need some sort of permission for that?” “If we’re going to do a large-scale performance, then yes, but I don’t think we need any for performing dances on a street corner.” “Open air performances are also included, right?” “Rather, they would be much more reasonable in our case. Only big groups would have to set up a circus tent and house guests.”

Naga showed a bit of a pondering attitude toward Raibach’s reply, but then, he quickly returned his face back to normal.

“In other words, it’s possible for us to form such a group, go to the city as if it’s nothing, gather spectators in the right place and perform…. the dances?” “I believe it’s highly possible. Since all the witches are beauties, there’s no doubt that spectators will gather. And no, I’m not flattering you at all.” “Is that so, is that so? Raibach, I had thought you’re a man with points worthy of note, but, it doesn’t seem you’re head over heels for me.”

Vita laughed as if being in a good mood.

(Mother, just how easily can you be stirred?)

Dora and Lily made dejected faces.

“What should be the right scope for our group?”

Raibach groaned after being asked by Naga.

“That’s right. With Naga-sama being the leader of our troupe, it would be five to 6 female dancers and three or four musicians. Also, dancers and musicians can shift with each other when it’s appropriate. Wouldn’t our group become complete with ten people? A four to five person group is too small, which might not be enough to convince others about us coming from far away, and reversely, if the group is too big, it will stand out.” “I see, so it’s ten, right? Provided that’s the final number, the next thing would be…. Lela.” “Ye, s? What is, it? “Can you think of an origin for our group and a route which it will go through?” “…… That’s, right. I wonder if it’s fine to tell them we come from the middle of the continent, since Naga-san looks like a foreigner. As for the origin and the route, I’ve thought about something, but, how do we explain to them we were able to enter the westernmost peninsu, la?

Naga recalled the map of the surroundings, which he had been shown before.

“If I remember correctly, the peninsula can only be accessed from its entrance. True, we would have to enter the royal capital from somewhere in north, otherwise, wouldn’t they become suspicious of us? *Tch* It’s indeed troublesome.” “Ah, I think there should be no concern about that.”

At Raibach’s voice, everyone shifted their gaze in his direction at once.

“Ummm, Lela-san, do you still have the map?”

“I’ll bring i,t.”

Lela, who stood up, dashed out of the room and returned back immediately.

“I’ve brought the ma,p. Is this fi,ne?

As soon as Lela spread out a large piece of cloth, on which the map was drawn, on top of the floor, everyone leaned forward.

“Here. If my memory serves me right, shouldn’t there be the port city of Lancel located at this point?”

Raibach, who had stepped forward and bent his legs, pressed with his finger a certain point on the map.

“If we cross the western part of the inland sea and arrive at the port city of Lancel, we can rush off from one place to another without the need of stopping

in cities along the way. If we are asked about the route, which we had gone through, we can easily deceive the people in Kasandora by telling them there's a road along the Schweiz River running from the city of Lancel, and that we arrived at the Kingdom from the south. The road is old, and since not many people have been using it recently, it's become rough, but…."

Naga followed Raibach's finger with his eyes. Once his finger tapped the capital on the map, Naga lifted up his head while saying 'I see'.

"Having that route, we can pass near this fort's surroundings without any concern. If that's the case, I guess this excuse may come in handy when needed. Excellent. Then, shall we go with that setting?" "Naga-sa, n. I think it's a good idea to reach Kasandora Kingdom's capital through Lancel City, bu, t, it will look unnatural if we don't bring a cart and camping tents with us, since we're going to become a troupe of entertainers. What should we, do? "Can't we prepare those things once we return back to the black forest?"

Naga directed his gaze at Harrigan and asked that question.

"We can somehow manage the tents, but, a cart will be impossible, I guess." "Well, is that so?" "In that case, what should we do after we arrive at Lancel City?"

Everyone shifted their attention to Raibach's questioning voice.

"Wouldn't it be okay for us to prepare the necessary things and dress up ourselves there? I think it's a good idea to reach that city on foot, along the Schweiz river, and then aim for the capital. If by any chance, they ask us about the route, we can simply answer them we came on foot." "Oh, that's it!"

Naga clapped his hands together.

"Ah, but…" "Is there something wrong, Lela?" "We need money to supply ourselves with necessary thing, s." "A….Ah, so it's about money?

Naga looked at Harrigan and Vita alternately.

"Ummm, what about that? Harrigan? Vita?"

Harrigan and Vita stuck out their extra-large and flat chests, respectively, and stated: "We have, no money, you see." "Not in the slightest." "It won't do, even

if you stick out your chests and act big.”

Naga dropped his shoulders dejectedly.

“Umm, Ane-sama…” “What is it, Ais?” “How about we sell out the jewels, ornaments and small tools at our warehouse? ” “Ah, those? Still, we don’t know how much they’re worth, and nobody from us is acquainted with humans’ sense of values. It may also be possible for those items to be sold dirt cheap if we try to sell them.”

“I don’t think they’re that cheap, but, how about we carry them here and have Raibach-san take a look? Maybe, we’ll able to more or less grasp their value?” “You’ve got a point. We can’t assess the items in practice, but, at least…. we should be able to tell their approximate worth.” “Fumu, I guess you’re right. Then shall we do it? Yuuki, I might be troubling you, but, can you return back to the fort inside the black forest together with Lela? We need you to select and bring us worthy-looking items among the used goods inside the warehouse.” “That’s fine, but, wouldn’t it be much faster for me to fly there alone?” “If it’s just you, there’s a risk you might bring us nothing but useless junk.”

Yuuki bent backward with all her might.

“Hari-nee, you’re cruelll”

(She’s right about Yuuki.) (She’s right, she’s right.)

Because Kay and Nonoel nodded in agreement, Yuuki suspended her eyes and stared at both of them.

The two of them quickly averted their eyes.

“If there are items you can’t carry with, leave them to Ixine. It should be fine for her to transport them using a horse. That being said, you will depart at dawn, tomorrow.”

“Yes, Ane-sa, ma.”

Lela nodded down straightforwardly; nevertheless, Yuuki had a discontent expression.

“Even though I could do it alone.”

Yuuki kept complaining like that.

“After that, we shall call back Ixine and sent her as a substitute.” “With this, the next thing we have to do is to dress our female dancers and sneak into the royal capital, I guess.”

Soon after Naga said so, Kay raised her hand first.

“Me, me! I’ll do it, I’ll do it!” “Kay?” “Areee? What’s the meaning behind those doubtful eyes of yours, Naga-san?” “No, wouldn’t it be meaningless for you to dance? To begin with, will any spectator come and watch you? Is what I mean.” “I’ve been told something rude just now!” “Isn’t it? With Kay, it won’t be possible for us gather spectators. It can’t be helped. In that case, should I be the one to undress?” “I don’t understand at all what you’re talking about, Vita-san.” “Haaah? What do you mean to say, Kay? “N…….No, nothing in particular….” “Probably, only those with special preferences will gather around Kay, Vita, and Nonoel. As one would expect, it won’t do as long it’s not someone, like Ais, Cu, or myself, right?”

Saying that, Harrigan leaned her upper body forward.

“Uwaa, if it’s against those three, then it’ll be no conteeeest.”

Kay’s eyes became teary as if from vexation.

“Speaking of which, I too was smoothly put into the same group as you, Kay?”

Nonoel bent slightly backward.

“Eh? I didn’t plan to be in the same group with you, Nonoel.”
“……..*Uuuu*…….”

Nonoel dropped her shoulders down dejectedly.

It seemed as though their discussion entered a topic which shouldn’t be touched. ‘Let’s leave that aside.’ – Not feeling like he could avert his eyes again, Naga hurriedly steered the topic back onto the right track.

“Then, we’ll be recruiting volunteers. Those, who want to join as female dancers, put up your hands.” “””””Me, Me, Me!”””””

“Everyone except Yuuki is volunteering?!” “I guess that was to be expected.” “Right?”

The witches looked at each other faces and nodded.

“I really want try to visit a human city.”

Kay put her hand up once more.

“True. I too haven’t walked around human cities for a long time.” “Honestly, mother has already been there before, so give us a chance this time.”

Once Lily said so, Vita snorted with laughter.

“It seems that Lily will be withdrawing, Naga.” “That’s crueell. I want to go there as well~”

“…..So does everyone, want the same?”

Everyone nodded down deeply at once.

Sigh – Naga breathed a sigh and looked up.

“If that’s the case, we can only decide with casting lots, so as to avoid any unfairness.” “Oh righttt!”

Kay raised her hand overhead.

“I’m quite confident when it comes to drawing lots!” “Fuun. Just like Kay, I’m not going to lose.”

Harrigan stood up while feeling relaxed. Vita too rose up with an indomitable spirit.

“I’ll show you, the strength of my draws blessed by the goddess of luck.”

(Was that so?)

Once Lily turned her look next to her, there was Dora shaking her head from side to side.

(It’s just a saying, a saying.)

“I’m going to say this, but, even if both Harrigan and Vita draw winning lots, I’ll still have one of you stay here.”

“What?!” “What the?!”

(Honestly, those girls….)

“Provided I’m absent, one of you will need to stay behind and take care of this fort, so…” “…..And what if you’re the one staying, Naga?”

As soon as Harrigan said so with a wry face, Vita clapped her hands together.

“Ohh! that’s an idea!” “As if!? What is this troupe going to do without me?!” “N….No, I was just making an assumption.” “D…Don’t mind that.” “I do?! By the way, doesn’t it feel like you want to go there just to have fun? This infiltration is of great importance to our surveillance, you know?” “T, That’s why, we’re telling you we got that. Right, Harrigan?” “C, Clearly and loudly.”

Naga stared at them with reproachful eyes.

“H, Hey, Naga, aren’t we going to do the draw quickly?” “Well, I guess that’s fine. Then, Raibach can you prepare lots? Also, it’s already been decided that you will come with us.” “Me?” “You’re the only one who’s familiar with human society. We won’t be able to sell our goods if you aren’t with us.” “You’ve got a point.” “Well, but still, you’ll act as our troupe’s guard. Just to make sure, I think it’s better to change your outfit when we enter the city.” “……That’s right. Yes, understood. Even if I don’t talk directly to anyone, there’s a chance my identity might be revealed.” “And then, by virtue of one’s office, Linne and Linna will join us as well.”

There was a reason for that. Thanks to their magic, both Linne and Linna could increase their sensitivity to the surroundings. In other words, if they increase their hearing ability, they could gather information even from passerby’s gossip.

“Yess.” “Right, isn’t it?”

The twin sisters clapped their hands together and jumped up in joy.

“Mu…”

The remaining witches looked at them with envious and scornful eyes.”

“Well, then, I’ll be making the lots. Do you have any unnecessary cloth?”

Raibach, who received an old rag, tore it into reasonable pieces and added markings on a few of them.

“Then, I guess… it should be fine for us to go with ten people as female dancers and players? “Yes, that’s a good number. There will be a total of ten female dancers and players, excluding Linne and Linna, who will act separately as information gatherers…. No, wait. In that case, we would have to prepare at

least two carts. I'll have Raibach operate one of them, and Ixine, the other."

Just as Naga said, currently, Ixine was the only one who excelled in horse riding among all the witches.

"With that, Ixine will tag along with us too. Guess the remaining 9 will be decided by lots." "Damn. I should've practiced more horse riding!"

Kay held her head in her hands, but it was too late now.

"By the way, nobody here can use magic to peek through cloth, right?"

Raibach directed that question at Harrigan, but she denied it by waving her hands from side to side.

"There isn't, so don't fret." "In that case, please choose your lot."

Raibach lined up the torn cloth pieces on the floor. As he did so, the witches reached out their hands and snatched their lots.

"I did it!" "Gyaaa, it's a miss!" "Yesss!" "Ugyaaa!"

Screams and voices of joy mixed with each other inside the room.

In the end, those who got lucky were:

Kay Vita Ais Lela Cu Harlequin Nonoel Lily Dora

Together with Ixine, the total number of dancers would be ten. In addition to that, Linne and Linna would act as a separate group.

With Naga being the leader and Raibach, his bodyguard, the lineup had been decided.

4

“Excellent. Now that the group has been generally outlined, we’ll go over the plan one last time.”

As Naga declared, the witches returned back to their seats. Some of them were cheerful, others, reluctant, and yet another, dropped their shoulders, clearly disappointed.

“We’ll follow Raibach’s advice and set off to the port city of Lancel at once. After we finish dressing up there as a group of itinerant entertainers, our next destination will be the Kasandora Kingdom. The reason for us passing through Lancel will be due to the city acting as a transit point for traders and itinerant entertainers who arrive from far away. That being said, even a foreigner like me won’t stand out, as it should make sense to tell them we come from far east.”

Naga cut his words at that point and faced Raibach.

“This should do, right?” “Yes, it should be fine.” “Thinking of our origin and route, I’ll leave that job to Lela. Are you okay with that, Lela?” “Under, stood.”

Lela replied by lightly raising up her right hand.

“They might think we’re suspicious going through the trouble of coming to the Kasandora Kingdom, despite them being in conflict with the witches right now, but, we’ll carry through by saying we come from far away and that we’re unaware of their current situation. And then,”

Naga pointed to a certain location on the map.

“We’ll return to the Schweiz River from Lancel and go north along the river toward Kasandora Kingdom’s territory. Should we also tell them we tried to do a performance at Fort Ein, but were eventually driven away by the witches? If Kasandora’s soldiers learn of such information, we might be questioned about the situation at the fort. Reversely, we’ll be able to ask for more details on their

current state of affairs. In case we are asked, I'll be the one to answer their questions, but, I'd like to have everyone here bear in your mind our origin and route, which Lela's going to devise. Got it?"

"Yees, we'll do our besttt."

Each of the witches put up their hands and nodded energetically.

"The next thing would be to re-confirm our program and the list of participants. So, those in charge of dancing and playing are Vita, Ais, Kay, Lela, Cu, Harlequin, Nonoel, Lily, and Dora. Ixine, who isn't present here with us right now, will join as well. Linne and Linna will be gathering information as a separate group, whereas, I will be the leader of this troupe, and Raibach, our guard who will be also in charge of odd jobs. Basically, the program will be about you, girls, dancing, but, decide between each other who's going to perform during what song."

"""Understoodddd!""" "Well, in the end, the program is just a formality. You should be able to attract and satisfy viewers even with your exposed limbs and your prideful, risqué garments."

As Naga said so, Ais objected with a seemingly vexed expression.

"Umm, Naga-san, we aren't particularly proud of our risqué clothes, you know? It's fine to say we're wearing those ultrathin clothes, simply because they're convenient when using our magic. It's not like we're showing off to you, or want you watching us at all, you see?"

As soon as Ais cracked a smile, Naga hurriedly waved his hands in from of himself vehemently.

"Ah, I got it. Of course, I got it."

"I really wonder about that."

Kay looked at Naga with doubting eyes.

"Let's put that matter aside. Still, there's no doubt that any human male will be pleased from watching your appearances, so spectators are bound to gather. Once they gather, we'll most likely be able to overhear various rumors. First, let's do some rehearsal when we arrive at Lancel. If possible, I'd like to practice a

method that will allow us to pick up on only valuable information. Linne, Linna, I'll leave that in your care."

'We'll do our best' – both sisters put up their hands and replied with approbative voices.

Both Linne and Linna were most suitable for the job, since they could catch any whisper within nearly 300 meters, thanks to their magic enhancing their hearing ability.

"We also need to sell and convert jewelry and used goods into money upon entering Lancel, but, I'll entrust Raibach with that task. That's because there's no one besides him who can do the negotiations." "Understood. I'll negotiate the price of items and sell them as profitably as possible." "Still, we can't tell for sure if the items in the warehouse can be sold for much."

Harrigan said so while shrugging her shoulders.

"In the worst case, we'll be only able to prepare ourselves with how much we gain from the sales."

Replying so, Naga looked around at the witches once more.

"Up to this point, does anyone still have any questions?"

However, there was nobody throwing out a question in particular.

"Ah, I would've forgotten, but, during our trip to Lancel, you'll be all wearing different clothes from your usual ones. Otherwise, it won't do, you see."

"Human clothes are heavy, thick, and hot inside, so, seriously, I don't like them much."

Harlequin twitched her hair, which looked like an animal's ears, and complained.

"It can't be helped. Since there's a risk you'd be suspected as witches from the beginning, I can only have you all, girls, bear with that. Don't you think so, Raibach?"

Looking at the witches with a sidelong glance, Raibach slightly nodded.

"Yes. What's more, there are no girls who would usually dress like that." "You

don’t have to wear restrictive, extra clothes, as long you cover your top. Even something similar to Elysione’s mantle will suffice. After that, perhaps I should have us dye our hair, or cover our face with pigments, so as to get mixed in among the other people.” “Isn’t it bothersome as well?” “More importantly, Harlequin, will you be okay with those eyes of yours? It looks like each of them is a different color, still…” “Ah~, the colors will fade if I cancel my magic, so I should be able to manage them somehow.”

Despite being told so, Naga was still hesitating. As he bent his head, Harrigan threw him a lifeboat.

“Harlequin’s magic is peculiar, you see. She will use her magic most of the time, so as to communicate with animals. Just like me, she doesn’t need to recite any incantation. As long as we have her understand when to use her magic under normal circumstances, it should probably be easy. By the way, whenever she activates her magic, her left and right eye will become different from each other.” “I see. Then, does it mean she can’t communicate with animals when her magic is off?” “That’s what I mean.”

Naga pondered for a while, however, he immediately lifted his face.

“…..You won’t be able to talk with animals when dancing in front of people, so are you fine with that?” “It will be alright, I guess.” “Aren’t you being quite light-hearted there?”

Naga gazed at the buoyantly-looking Harlequin, but then, he quickly softened his gaze and directed his sight toward Harrigan and Vita.

“Isn’t this the type of season where the rain usually continues for many days?” “If it’s this season, I think there’s no need to worry about rain that much, but…”

Once Harrigan replied that way, Vita, who bent her small head, threw out a question in doubt.

“Does it have something to do with our trip?” “It does. If the path becomes slushy, our carts will be held up, making our goal far from being reached. Besides, if the rain continues to fall even after we enter the city, it will affect your performance.”

“Is that so? Then, it’s just like Harrigan says, I don’t think there will be any

rainy days this season. Even if there are, it will be a drizzle at most. In addition to that, if there's no strong wind, we should be at least able to dance. Rather, wouldn't viewers be even happier to see our clothes become transparent from getting soaked?"

"Ohhh, for real? I see. Indeed, it may be something to look forward to!"

As soon as Naga clapped his hands together without realizing, Vita suddenly retorted at him.

"Don't be happy!"

Shortly after, the other witches:

"""Don't be happy!"""

"N, Not like I'm happy or anything."

Naga made such an excuse. Staring at Naga with a dumbfounded face again, Raibach once more felt admiration toward him.

(Taking on these frightening witches as his opponents and still being able to act that naturally, that's truly amazing. As one would expect, is it because of Naga-sama being a foreigner? Or perhaps, is it because of him being the real messenger of the Dragon King? What's more, he's able to consider lots of situations when devising a counterplan in advance. Should one say he's shrewd, or maybe vigilant? Whichever it is, he isn't any ordinary person.) Raibach contemplated again, so as to make sure he hadn't made a mistake when he chose to serve Naga.

"Well then, let's quickly move forward with the preparations starting from this night. Our time of departure will also depend on how the Kasandora Kingdom will act, but, should we set off after 3 days if nothing changes?"

Following Naga's words, their early arrangements commenced.

Since then, 2 days have passed and the witches continued to prepare in a hurry for the departure while being completely devoted to their dance practice.

5

Later, according to Yuuki, no signs of Kasandora troops, attempting to capture Fort Ein again, were found. There were several dozen soldiers walking nearby the fort, but, because they wouldn't approach any closer than a fixed distance, they were simply thought to be reconnaissance groups.

Deeming there was no need to worry about their enemy striking back for now, Naga decided to form and dress up his troupe, after which, they would commence their plan of sneaking into the Kingdom of Kasandora.

First, they had to set off to Lancel, dress up there as itinerant entertainers, and do a rehearsal in front of the local people there. Afterwards, they would return to the Schweiz River and go north along it towards Kasandora Kingdom's territory.

In order not to stand out, Naga and his party slipped out from Fort Ein, broke through the mountain, and departed toward the left bank of the Schweiz River. From there, they followed the river and headed toward Lancel.

6

Meanwhile, in the fortified city of Granvista.

In a certain room located inside a cathedral, Cardinal Aiba was receiving a report from one of the Old Church's subordinates that worked as their intelligence operative.

Those who engaged themselves in intelligence activity for the Old Church were known as s 'people overhearing the mass's voices' and mostly referred to as POMVs.

Aiba, who was hearing out one of those POMVs, frowned his eyebrows with a seemingly discontent expression.

"Kasandora Kingdom has suffered another defeat?" "Yes. Their troops, which had been dispatched to retrieve Fort Ein, were splendidly repelled by the witches back to Kasandora's royal capital."

Aiba responded as if wanting to spit out.

"Good grief, they are all bark and no bite. To think they would lose one battle after another to a mere 30 to 40 witches."

(As one would expect, I made a grave mistake by placing my trust in that country. I was totally right to summon the Brigade of 88 and request troops from neighboring countries.) Aiba, who was both an archbishop and cardinal of the Old Church, was extremely keen on exterminating the witches.

One could understand well how vehement Aiba was about that, as he himself aspired to be appointed in this place. For him, the witches who nested inside the Black Forest were beings that should be driven away as fast as possible. The witches are the enemies of humankind, the children of God. Therefore, no presence of the witches could be acknowledged in this area. No, generally, their very existence denied them any place in this world. Such was Aiba's belief.

Because of that, it was rational for him to think that those who had lost to the witches should not be in the position of receiving God's grace.

(I can no longer expect anything from that country, however, they should make up for their losses by decreasing the strength of the witches, even if it's just a bit. Otherwise….) "Is there anything else you wish to know, Sir?"

The man who was reporting kneeled down with his head lowered. Aiba casted his eyes at the top of the man's head and asked.

"What happened, to Kasandora's troops? Could it be they were destroyed during their battle against the witches?" "No, it appears that their troops sustained no major losses." "If that's the case, I'll have them form new troops, and, join me, once more, in a sortie against the witches." "About that…." "Hm? Did something happen?" "From what we could see, it looked like Kasandora Kingdom's army, was making preparations for holing up their capital."

A sign of doubt surfaced on Aiba's face.

"Holing up their capital? Could it be that the witches are making an onslaught on them?" "No, the witches won't leave Fort Ein." "And despite that, they're are trying to lock themselves in?" "This is how things looked to us."

(What's the meaning of this, you bunch from Kasandora Kingdom?)

Suppressing his urge to smacking his lips, Aiba bombarded the POMV with questions.

"Are they preparing their capital against the witches? Even though they sustained no casualties? Have they become that weak?" "Certainly, the army of Kasandora has diminished in strength, but, their attitude this time appears to be a bit different from what we can see as holing up against the witches. Also, the southern part of the capital doesn't seem to be that reinforced." (……What's the meaning of this.)

Aiba, whose face wanted to express doubt, pondered the meaning behind the subordinate's report for a while.

(Then, against whom are they holing up against? If their enemy isn't the witches…….Could it be?!) Aiba was struck dumb upon realizing a certain possibility.

“Could it be, they’re holing up against the Witch Extermination Army?”

The POMV would neither deny or confirm Aiba’s words, which could be perceived as either a monologue or a question directed towards the man. Asking beyond the man’s capability would be the same as piling up one guess after another.

“I can’t say for sure, but, it’s almost certain that Kasandora Kingdom is preparing to hold the city. We can’t tell who their perceived enemy is, however, just as we stated before, there are missing points in assuming that the witches could be their enemy.”

Stopping at where he stated the fact, the man left speculating and drawing conclusions to Aiba.

Aiba’s face changed from that of a gentle and benevolent God’s face into a fuming one expressed by warriors of God who seek the annihilation of their enemies. Judging from the POMV’s report, Aiba could think of nothing but the fact that Kasandora is attempting to hole up.

“If their enemy isn’t the witches, then, I can only imagine it’s the extermination army. Just what on earth is that king thinking about…. no.”

(That’s right. There’s been a report about Kasandora Kingdom’s king falling ill and his nephew, Guiscard, being transferred his authority. In other words, is he the one responsible for this? Still, be it the king or Guiscard, their actions are still nonsensical. Why are they holding the city, instead of fighting the witches?) General Guiscard, who was the lawful owner of the king’s rights, has been aspiring to be installed as king. For him, the kingdom was of utmost—sometimes, even stronger than God’s will—-importance. However, for Aiba, who was an ardent believer of God, Guiscard’s practical thoughts and sense of values were outside his scope of reasoning.

Aiba regained his calm expression and called out to the POMV with a calm voice.

“Please continue your observation on Kasandora’s movements. For the sake of our Lord’s will.” “For the sake of our Lord’s will.”

Bowing down deeply, the man stood up slowly and calmly only to bow down

again, after which he would retreat.

Aiba saw off the POMV till he disappeared from the room's entrance. Shortly after, he called out to a priest, who had been on a standby in the next room.

"What do you seek from me, Aiba-sama?" "I've figured out what I want to discuss urgently. Please bring Jeweljude-dono, the leader of the Brigade of 88, to me immediately."

Once the young priest paid his respects to Aiba, he quickly withdrew from the room.

7

“Was it you who called me, Aiba-dono?

The giant, who behaved as if looking up to Aiba, entered his office in a clumsy manner. Jeweljude wasn’t wearing his helmet, but, his metal armor, gauntlets, and tough leather boots, which strengthened his body, gave him a posture to be ready for a fight at any time.

“Thank you for coming. How have the preparations for the sortie been progressing?”

The first thing Aiba did, after Jeweljude entered, was asking him such a question with a harmless and inoffensive attitude.

“I guess, not quite.”

At his response, Aiba made a grimace.

“No matter what we do, it takes time to prepare, since we are putting together troops from each country. And when it comes to applying a shared strategy, every troop is bound to undergo an appropriate amount of training. Not to mention, we still need to decide on how to dispatch messengers, how to signal our movements, and what formation we should take. We also need to learn more about the witches’ method of attack. At least, if we don’t possess a common knowledge of these, our troops will fall into disorder sooner or later during the battle.”

Cutting his words, it was rare for Jeweljude to breathe a sigh.

“Truly, this is a bothersome matter. It could’ve been many times faster and convenient to mobilize just us, the Brigade of 88, but well…”

Aiba nodded down with a composed, or rather, cool-headed expression.

“I understand. However, this will become a lesson for us for the next time. The witches are beings that oppose the will of God, and hence, they have to be

eradicated without exception. We need to show that, the truth about the witches, and also how they're being completely annihilated to society, and the world. For that, we need other neighboring countries to join us."

"Well, I do understand your point, but, whatever. Then, the only reason you called me was to check on the preparations?"

"No, I receive a report on that each day, so I wouldn't have gone through the trouble of calling you here because of that."

(If that's the case, why did you call me during this goddamn busy time?)

Is what Jeweljude thought. However, he knew Aiba wouldn't call him for no reason.

Being worked to death by the preparations, there had to be an important reason behind Jeweljude being summoned. Thinking back upon it, he awaited Aiba's next words.

"Kasandora Kingdom has been showing a bit of a strange attitude, you see." "A strange attitude?"

The cardinal briefly and quickly explained the situation to Jeweljude, who twisted his neck in confusion at Aiba's words.

Jeweljude, who had finished listening, twisted his neck again.

"So Kasandora Kingdom is holing up itself? Not to mention, it's not against the witches? I can't grasp their reasoning." "I too am unable to understand their motive."

Replying that way, Aiba lightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Still,"

The cardinal directed his sight towards a map unfolded on top of his office desk and reached out his hand.

"Right now, there are only two military forces present in the area of the Kasandora Kingdom. One of them is the witches, which goes without saying, but,"

Aiba tapped the vicinity near Fort Ein with the tip of his index finger over and

over again.

“Could it be?!”

Jeweljude open widely his eyes, after which he looked at Aiba’s expression.

“Yes, that’s right. The only other force besides the witches here is the extermination army.” “I see. No…. P, Please wait a moment.”

Using his rough and thick right hand’s finger, Jeweljude rubbed his forehead.

“Do you mean to say that Kasandora Kingdom’s army is holing up against us? Why would they have to do that?”

Aiba deliberately shook his head from side to side.

“I’ve no idea. Not the slightest idea as to why they would do so.” “…..Is there any argument supporting your guess that they aren’t guarding themselves against the witches?” “The southern part of the kingdom, in other words, the direction from which Fort Ein is located, seems to be much less fortified than its northern part.” “Which is directed toward north….. That report, how credible is it?” “We used the service of a POMV that belongs to the Old Church, you see.”

(A POMV from the Old Church, is it? In that case, there’s no place for any mistake or nonsense.) Jeweljude, who was the leader of a combat group, called a ‘brigade’, had too often resorted to the use of POMVs. He knew very well he could rely on their information.

(Does it really mean, those guys from Kasandora Kingdom are planning to defend against us? Why are they doing this?) Guiscard’s system of values and pragmatic reasoning, which were the motives behind his actions, were things mostly prioritized in this age. However, for Jeweljude, just like for Aiba, that modus operandi lay outside their scope of thinking.

“….Fumu.”

Jeweljude said as if groaning lightly.

“Whatever the reason is, if it’s true they’re guarding against us…. their actions might hinder our attempt of destroying the witches. There’s a chance that the troops sent by our allies will feel uneasy due to them being possibly backstabbed by Kasandora from behind. What’s more, there’s also the problem of army

provisions. If Kasandora refuses to share their provisions with us, we'll be forced to carry our own provisions from here. It would be a different story if it was just us, but, carrying food for an army of 3500 would require a mass of workforce. What should we do?"

Aiba looked at Jeweljude with sharp eyes.

"First, we'll sent a messenger to Kasandora, so as to question their real motive. However…."

Jeweljude, whose eyes were filled with sarcasm, asked back.

"Will they provide us with a straight forward answer?"

(Rather, there's no way for them to give us an honest answer.)

Jeweljude, the God's warrior from the Old Church, had no need for things like diplomacy or bargaining, as authorities from this world had often abused their power to make use of him. Jeweljude would be deceived and manipulated by royalty and titled nobility numerous times, and even made to cover up for their own actions. Therefore, he learned through his experiences how insincere authorities were.

Nevertheless, it seemed like his sarcasm didn't pass through Aiba. The cardinal made a difficult expression and replied in a heavy tone.

"We can't be certain about anything, you see. Still, depending on what their answer is, we'll probably have to use tough measures."

Jeweljude again opened his eyes widely and shifted his sight towards the cardinal.

"Aiba-dono, you don't mean to say?!" "Those who express no willingness in attacking the witches, or far from that, attempt to hinder us, are also considered as allies of the witches. That's to say, an enemy of God."

Aiba whose eyes were filled with ominous light stared back at Jeweljude.

"Enemies of God can only be annihilated, regardless of whether they are the witches or humans. Don't you think so, Jeweljude-dono?" "Yes, that's…."

Despite Jeweljude making a vague nod, he couldn't really hide his bewilderment.

Certainly, he has been fighting nothing but God's enemies till now. Among his opponents there were witches as well, however, the majority of them were humans. That's why, if Kasandora Kingdom chooses to go against the will of God, Jeweljude will not hesitate to remove them.

(Nonetheless, why now?)

This was something he couldn't comprehend.

Kasandora Kingdom's large-scale attack against the witches was repelled. Not to mention, they had one of their forts stolen away by the witches. And then, again they suffered another defeat when trying to retrieve said fort.

The witches were displaying an unexpected strength. In addition to that, they also released many captives. The witches were light hearted, tolerant, and generous in doing so, and they wouldn't execute their prisoners as a form of warning.

The war against the witches was showing its new face and was different from what it had been till now. Jeweljude, who could feel that change on his skin, became even more perplexed.

(So, does it mean that Kasandora Kingdom has started to hole themselves up against someone other than the witches? Why have they decided on such an insane move now, when me and the Brigade of 88 will arrive? Is this a mere coincidence? Or perhaps, it's due to the intervention of someone transcending humankind?) When talking about someone transcending humankind, one would think about that person as a being close to god; nevertheless, Jeweljude promptly denied such a possibility.

(It's true that even the Lord himself will put us to the test at times, but, I don't believe he would do things like this on a whim. If so, is this someone's ill intention? Or perhaps, a manifestation of that person's artifice? In that case, who's that person? Could it be that someone provoked Kasandora and its general into doing this?) However, Jeweljude himself denied even those doubtful feelings inside his heart.

(There isn't supposed to be someone like that. If there was, Aiba would immediately notice. To think that even someone, like Aiba, could be bewildered by such turn of events. Even if we assume that the witches are the ones who

incited Kasandora Kingdom, there should be no way for the latter to succumb. I also don't get why the witches have become more assertive in their actions. Could it be that there's some link between these 2 events?) As Jeweljude was pondering, Aiba interrupted him with his words.

"Can I count on you, Jeweljude-dono?"

Jeweljude slowly lifted up his face and asked with a vigorous voice.

"Is it, okay for me to understand that…. as forcefully removing Kasandora Kingdom in case they try to hinder the advancement of our troops?"

"I do wish for you to understand my words that way. If they try to show any resistance, I won't mind even if you take down their capital. Perhaps, those who joined us in destroying the witches would become more motivated upon hearing they would be handed out a part of Kasandora Kingdom's territory."

"That may be true… but,"

(As one would expect, Aiba is willing to go to such an extent?)

Such a misgiving welled up inside of Jeweljude. However, he quickly became serious by telling himself he had to hasten with the preparations.

"Whatever Kasandora Kingdom decides to do, I need to hurry up with the preparations for the sortie. Nevertheless, I would like to ask you for slightly more accurate information, not just regarding the Kingdom of Kasandora, but also regarding the witches' attitude.

At Jeweljude's request, Aiba nodded down gravely.

"I shall throw in all the members of intelligence whom I have at my disposal and have them investigate those things."

"Provided that an attack on Kasandora Kingdom will be considered in our plan, we'll need to prepare siege weapons in addition. Again, it's going to take us more unnecessary time to—"

Jeweljude stated his opinion with a bitter face, but, Aiba didn't seem to be that concerned.

"You don't have to worry about time. That's because there will be no reinforcement coming to either the witches or Kasandora Kingdom, even if some

time passes, you see. The biggest problem would be to carry provisions and maintain the army, but, for the time being, I'll have the provisions stored here in Granvista."

(This guy is making the right decision. However, there's a concern that some of the allies will decide to drop out from the extermination army.) Jeweljude thought so, but nevertheless, even if he was to say it, Aiba would probably take no notice of his opinion.

(More importantly, why are the Kasandora Kingdom and the witches interfering now? Could this be the result of many coincidence? Or perhaps, inevitableness…..?) A small doubt, which was seemingly something to be ignored, felt like an uneasiness at the same time. Despite it being just a small doubt, what annoyed Jeweljude was the excessive sense of discomfort resulting from it. The uneasiness he felt was as though someone invisible was trying to bring a new commotion. However, Jeweljude scattered that feeling against his own will.

(Even if I think about that, nothing will begin. The witches, an enemy of God, need to be exterminated. It is the duty of us, the warriors of God, to carry out this task. Be it an artifice or someone's will, we shall only pulverize them!) Jeweljude's expression returned back to that of a warrior of God, and his raised rough voice could be felt reverberating inside one's stomach.

"Well then, I shall hasten myself with the preparations." "Please continue your favor toward us."

Jeweljude left Aiba's office while making footsteps as though they were shaking the room.

Chapter 3-The Performance of the Dancers

1

Lancel City was situated at the mouth of the Schweiz River, forming a harbor city with walls on three sides, and the fourth side facing the river. The Schweiz River mouth was wide, and as the river flows into the western sea straits, ships on long voyages frequent this harbor.

Naga and company stood beside the harbor and watched the large ships enter and exit the harbor.

Naga was the head of the traveling troupe, Raibach performed miscellaneous duties and escorts, and the dancers were Vita, Ais, Kay, and Lela. Linne and Linna were responsible for collecting intelligence from the streets, and will work separately from the rest.

Twelve of the group of fourteen were girls, giving it an air of splendor.

But to avoid attracting too much attention, the witches covered the clothes they were wearing or put on cloaks.

The crews on the ships unloaded large amounts of cargo from the massive sail ships and emptied them out, and then loaded the cargo piled up at the harbor into the ships.

The angry yells and shouts of the crew resonated in the vicinity.

Cargo filled wagons bustled in the harbor.

The bell rang, notifying the arrival or departure of ships.

Seagulls congregated and leered at the fishes caught by the fishermen.

The smell of the sea wafted in with the warm sea breeze.

The bustling scene of the harbor stimulated Naga's senses.

"I think I saw a scene like this somewhere before."

Lela's sharp ears heard what he muttered, and pressed him with sparkling eyes:

"Is that place the world you were, from?"

Lela showed her strong sense of curiosity, and wished to further understand the world Naga was from. Seeing Lela acting this way, Naga smiled wryly.

"Should be. I have a sense of Déjà vu, maybe I saw a harbor like this before."

"Did you remember, something?"

"Nothing, I just felt nostalgic, like I've seen this scene before. I don't remember the details though."

After Lela, who was leaning close to Naga, heard that, her shoulders drooped regrettably.

"Hahaha, don't be so depressed. I'm not bothered by something like this."

"I don't care about you, I just want to understand the world you are, from."

"Oh, is that so."

Naga shrugged. He was wearing a loose attire that seemed foreign in origin. They weren't his clothes or those given to him by Harrigan and the others. They were clothes from the central world prepared just for this investigative trip. The witches around him didn't wear their usual skin revealing clothes, and put on clothes from the central world too. Many of the witches even dyed their hair or applied coloring to their faces and skin to disguise themselves.

Not only did Raibach dye his hair, he even cut it short and put on a hooded cloak and shades. His outfit made it certain that he won't be recognized even if he met someone who knew him. Raibach wore a sword as his setting was the escort of the group.

Naga changed his hairstyle too, and swapped his katana for a sword that was commonly seen in this world. The guards saw his face when he took the fort, so

he had to take additional care. It was very unlikely they would run into soldiers who defended Fort Ein in Lancel City, but this would likely happen if they enter the Kasandora Kingdom, so this was also, in a way, practice.

“Alright, we will head for the antique shops and sell the weapons and jewelry. We will then buy two carriages, tents and things like musical instruments. I’m counting on you, Rai… No, Hoodins.”

“Yes, head Najunkray, I will try my best to get a good price.”

The two addressed each other by their alias, Raibach did so as he might run into people who had seen him before, while Naga’s name had the connotation of ‘Dragon King’, which will attract suspicious eyes…. No, in this case, it will attract suspicious ears, so it was decided that they will call each other by aliases as they investigated while undercover.

As no humans know the names of the witches, they used their original names.

2

The weapons and jewelries sold for an unexpectedly high price, it wouldn't be an exaggeration to say this was a sizeable piece of wealth. Raibach was skilled in negotiations, but it was mostly the merit of the highly valuable merchandise.

Vita looked at the bag of gold coins — not silver, but gold coins, signifying the high selling price— and looked very impressed.

"Oh, so these pieces of junk can sell for such a good price. I guess we should inspect the things in our warehouse again, right, Dona?"

"Yes, dear mother."

"Even if we sell them for a good price, there isn't any place to spend it."

"That's a good point, shall we stop the investigation?"

"No, do it anyway. Even if we don't sell them, there's no harm in knowing the value of the things we have. After we go back, do a spring cleaning of our warehouse immediately, and pick out the valuable items."

Me?— Dona pointed to herself, trying to confirm if Vita meant her.

"You and Elly will take care of it."

"Wahhh…"

Once she thought about the pile of items in the warehouse, with no telling if there was anything valuable in there, Dona couldn't help but smile stiffly.

"Just thinking about inspecting them one at a time gives me a headache."

"I don't mean just the two of you, but for you two to take charge and get the other girls to help."

"If that is the case, I will get it done."

Lily scowled her face at Dona, who sighed in relief.

“Alright, we’ll go shopping later. Before that, we have to find a place to spend the night.”

On Naga’s command, the group left the streets filled with shops, and they moved en masse to the place where the inns were.

3

Because their wares sold better than expected, Naga and company found a higher class hotel and decided to stay there. As they were a large group, they asked for a big room and two small rooms, then retired to their accommodations. Naga and Raibach, and Vita, Lily, and Dona moved into the two small rooms, respectively, and the Heindler witches brought their luggage into the big room.

After a short rest in the rooms, Naga said that he wanted to buy the necessary goods.

“Raibach and I will go, and in case anything happens, Lela will follow.”

If the talisman falls off or the effect fades, Naga won’t be able to talk to people. To avoid that, Naga requested Lela to accompany him.

“Who else wants to go?”

He asked the small room next door. The three girls resting inside stood up at the same time.

“Of course we want to go.”

Vita replied, Dona and Lily nodded repeatedly.

“There isn’t anything interesting about this trip though.”

“Just walking along the streets of the humans is an interesting experience, I haven’t had any chance to leave the forest recently, and this is the first time the girls are visiting a human city.”

“So you want to go sightseeing too. It’s the same for me, everything I see looks interesting.”

Naga then asked the witches in the big room, and all of them stood up excitedly.

“Do we need someone to guard the place?”

Naga looked troubled. Ais smiled and said:

“There isn’t any important luggage here, just bringing our valuables and the money we have gotten would be enough.”

“To be safe, I will prepare the guards.”

“Hmm? Harlequin wants to stay behind?”

When Naga asked, Harlequin muttered: “Tsk tsk tsk.” And shook her right index finger.

“That’s not what I meant, I will ask the wandering dogs in the area to look after the place.”

“Wandering dogs? Oh, you mean those stray dogs?”

“That’s right. Since this is a harbor city, there are many stray dogs. I just need to call a few over, and they will help us guard the place. If anyone tries to move our stuff sneakily, they can help to chase them away.”

“Would there be any problem doing that?”

“I just need to feed them something after it’s done.”

“Alright, I will leave this to you.”

By the way, the magic to communicate with animals is amazing. No, she is not the only amazing one.

If he had to say it, all the witches possess powerful spells, Naga found it hard to believe that they kept on losing to the human armies.

But they don’t know about tactics and strategy, so that isn’t strange.

When they left the inn, Harlequin whistled in a frequency inaudible to humans and summoned a few strays.

She spoke something to the strays, which Naga couldn’t understand. He asked Ais and Lela, who didn’t know either, so the other witches couldn’t decipher the conversation Harlequin had with the animals.

“Alright, that will do, we just need to buy some meat from the market to feed

them later.”

After Harlequin finished, Vita raised her right hand up high before Naga could reply: “Good, then let’s go!”

“Vita is really energetic.”

“Ah~ she has not visited a human city for a very long time, so bear with her over enthusiasm.”

Dona whispered in explanation to Naga, who smiled wryly and waved his right hand a little, gesturing to her not to mind. The group led by Naga and Raibach returned to the district filled with shops once again.

4

In the end, they bought two carriages, the horses to pull the carriages and horses to ride. They also purchased kitchen knives, pots, kettles, and other dinnerware. Extra sets of clothes, lutes, drums, and tents for camping outdoors were also procured.

The group carried the items onto the carriage, then those who can ride on horses did so, while those who can't (or didn't want to) got onto the carriages along with the cargo.

Vita complained that it was cramped inside the carriage, but since Dona, who was much bigger than her, squeezed between the cargo without a word, she couldn't say too much.

Under Naga's influence, the Heindler witches more or less had some training in riding horses, so aside from Harlequin, Linne, and Linna, all of them rode on the horses. Even though Ais, Kay, Cu, and Nonoel were really scared.

"Harlequin, wait."

Naga called out to her as she was about to board the carriage.

"What is it?"

"You can talk to animals right?"

"Not really converse with them, we can just communicate with each other."

"If that is so, why don't you ride a horse?"

"Fufufu." Harlequin showed a scornful smile, puff out her chest and said: "How foolish of you Naga. Communicating with animals and actually riding a horse are two different matters!"

"Do you need to get angry? And I don't get what you mean."

"If I ask the horse to run faster, I will fall off from it."

“What?”

“If I ask the horse to walk steadily and don’t let me fall off, the horse will walk very slowly.”

“……”

“I am not riding a horse in order to not trouble everyone!”

“……”

“Ah~~ I mean—”

At this moment, Ixine, who was in the driver’s seat of the carriage, said:

“What she means is that her horsemanship is terrible, so stop asking her about it.”

Harlequin twitched her hair that looked like beast ears, and turned towards Ixine resentfully.

“What nonsense is that, Ixine. There’s nothing wrong with my horsemanship. It isn’t that my skill is bad, it’s just that the horse can’t keep up with my skill.”

“Yes yes, I know. Let’s just accept this reason. It’s my fault Harlequin.”

“It makes me feel even more terrible when you apologize like that, Naga.”

Harlequin’s hair that looked like beast ears sagged down depressingly.

“Basically, the horse will move by itself. If you are too tense, the horse would be influenced by you and become harder to control.”

Naga, who was excellent in horsemanship advised, but to the people unaccustomed to riding horses, things were not as simple as he said.

“You will get used to it, you can ride it naturally after gaining some experience.”

Raibach had great horsemanship too, so he was in charge of driving a carriage, while Ixine who was the most eager to learn horse riding drove the other.

Naga led the way on his horse, followed by the witches— who were dressed like dancers — riding their horses, with the carriages driven by Ixine and Raibach at the very back. The group returned to the inn just like this, housed the horses

in the stables behind the inn, and fed them. Harlequin used this chance to summon the guard dogs and gave them some of the meat she’d bought.

5

Naga stood before the horses that had been separated from the carriage and fell into deep thought.

“Alright, we have to carry the small items to the rooms, and leave the large cargo on the carriages. Raibach, sorry about this, but I need you to keep watch here.”

“Understood. Don’t worry about me, I can sleep on the floor.”

“As for the other carriage…”

Naga was troubled over this when Harlequin returned after feeding the dogs and raised her hand.

“Ah, we don’t need to place a sentry, I asked those strays to help again. They are full of life after eating the meat, so we can leave it safely in their paws.”

“I see, let’s leave it to them then.”

Harlequin whistled silently again, and the strays gathered.

“Don’t let them get too close to the stables. It would be troublesome if the horses got spooked and makes a racket.”

“Got it.”

Harlequin squatted down before the strays and gave them the task. Even though Naga had the talisman given by Lela, he couldn’t understand what she was saying.

She is probably relaying my instructions, amazing.

“Let’s prepare dinner.” Ais said to the other witches.

Although they checked into an inn that was slightly higher class, only the very top class hotels in this era will provide meals for their guests. So they went to the market to buy ingredients.

“Dona, you girls help too.”

“Yes, dear mother.”

“Naga and Chief Vita, please rest in your rooms.”

“Is that alright? Thank you very much.”

“You are welcome.”

Ais answered with a smile, and added a line in her heart:

It’s the duty of the young ones to take care of the elderly.

“I will retire to my room then.”

“Yes, please have a good rest.”

After returning to his room, Naga laid on his bed and watched the ceiling.

Arara, unexpected things kept happening one after another. But the most unexpected thing of all is that I came to an alternate world.

He thought about the things that happened after he arrived and what the future held, and fell asleep gradually.

Naga woke when he heard someone calling out to him.

“Dinner is ready, please come to our room to eat.”

Naga sat up slowly and raised a hand at Ais.

“I will be right there.”

6

Naga still couldn't get used to bread.

What I ate in the past should have been easier to bite, soft and sweet… but what is it? But this isn't too bad.

Naga sent the sliced bread to his mouth, and thought about this as he chewed.

Aside from the bread, the other dishes taste great.

Pickles, vegetables, stewed duck, smoked bacon, and freshly grilled fish from the sea were laid out on the table, satisfying in both taste and portion.

If only there was rice…

"That's right, rice!"

Recalling the deliciousness of freshly cooked rice, Naga couldn't help shouting. The witches looked surprised and looked at Naga.

"But… there is no rice in this world."

Naga drooped his shoulders sadly.

"What is this rice thing?" Ais asked.

"In the place I came from, rice was the main staple food. Rice is complemented by the other dishes. I just remembered that."

"Rice… Rice… What is that, food?"

Lela's eyes were glowing as she leaned forward. Naga smiled wryly.

"How should I put this. It is the grain of a crop known as paddy. After harvesting it, milling it and washing it, it will be placed in a pot to simmer. After it is cooked, just steam it for a while and it will be ready to eat."

Lela had a confused expression and looked baffled; the other witches and Raibach were just like Lela and looked surprised.

“If you don’t see the real thing, you won’t understand. I don’t know how to explain it too.”

Naga scratched his head and smiled bitterly.

“But if you can recall one specific thing, you can remember others, right?” Lela said.

“I hope so. I will tell you if I remember anything, don’t worry.”

“I am looking forward to, it.”

“Forget the rice, let’s eat. We need to discuss about tomorrow after finishing.”

“That’s true, let’s eat and tidy up the room.”

After Ais said that, the witches stopped their chatter and finished their dinner early, then stood up to clean the place.

7

After cleaning up, the witches returned to the large room and began their discussion with Naga in the center.

“As planned, we will find a place to hold our performance tomorrow. All of you have prepared your dancing costumes already anyway.”

If they all wore different costumes, they wouldn’t look like dancers from the same troupe. Using the witches’ normal attires directly wasn’t suitable too, so Ais and the other dancers prepared a set of costumes.

As the purpose was to garner more audience, their attire was revealing and thin like their usual clothes. As they didn’t need to be concerned about using spells in battles, they added frilly accessories on their clothes to attract the audience’s attention through their dance.

“What about the venue?” Vita asked.

“If we perform near the harbor, we should be able to attract plenty of sailors, right?”

“That’s true, but they seem really busy. It would be better to perform in the streets in the morning, we can catch the morning crowd visiting the morning market.”

Naga nodded in agreement with Vita’s suggestion.

“Good point, let’s perform in the streets first. Linne and Linna will use the chance to move around, and listen to what the audience is saying.”

“Yes, understood.” x2

“Oh right. Naga, when I was walking in the streets just now, it doesn’t seem very peaceful.”

“Not peaceful? As in full of life?”

Vita thought about it and her face turned serious.

“… Not that way.”

“What do you mean?”

“Ugh, there isn’t anything in particular that makes me feel uneasy, just that it didn’t seem peaceful and people are panicky— That’s the impression I have. But I haven’t been to a human city for a long time, maybe it’s just my imagination.”

There must be a reason why Vita is saying this.

“I see. If Vita’s instincts are correct, there might be some incident that happened somewhere. Linne and Linna might be able to sniff something out in regards to this. I am bothered by something too. There were some young men and women tied up with ropes near the harbor, are they criminals?”

“No, they are slaves.” Vita said with disdain.

“Slaves…”

“Those are people bought by slave peddlers, and will be sold in a slave market somewhere.”

“Humans can be traded?”

“This isn’t such a rare sight. It’s common for humans.”

Naga crossed his arms and the corners of his lips drooped.

“I see, so this is normal in this world.”

“Isn’t there something like this in your world?”

“No… I am not sure too, but I don’t think the trading of humans was so open.”

“Oh, seems like your world is better in this aspect.”

As Naga and Vita chatted about this, Lela stared at Naga intriguingly.

“Alright, after I conquer the world, I will ban the trading of humans.”

What… What a confident guy. In his mind, is world conquest the default objective? Just who is this guy?

Vita appraised Naga closely.

“Hmm? What’s the matter?”

“No… it’s nothing.”

His grandiose words make me question if there is something wrong with his head… It is doubtful, but he should be serious. And there is something about this man that makes me believe he can make this future a reality. If not, I wouldn’t have placed my bet on him.

“Fu, I will look forward to it.”

“Alright, back to the topic at hand. We will decide on the venue after we reach the streets tomorrow, let’s sleep early everyone. Oh right…”

Naga turned and asked Harlequin.

“Can you ask the dogs to keep watch the entire night?”

“It shouldn’t be a problem, but to be safe, I will check on them later.”

“I see, I will go with you too.”

“You don’t need to come though.”

“I am the head of the troupe after all, checking on the carriages is part of my job. The inn staff is here too, and I need to be aware of how the other customers see us. I need to perform my duties too.”

“Oh.” Harlequin said, and it was obvious she didn’t understand and seemed baffled.

“Is that so? I’m not opposed to you coming if you insist.”

“I will go check on the horses then.” Ixine raised her hand and said.

“Okay, I will leave the horses to you.”

Naga turned back and faced everyone.

“Everyone, please have a good rest.”

At this moment, Ais raised a question.

“Naga, aren’t you tired?”

“This isn’t much.”

“But when we were running in the Black Forest, you were the first one to tire.”

“Ughh.” Naga sighed, lowered his head and said: “Back then, I had just came to this world.”

“Hmmm!?” Kay exclaimed in surprise, then retorted: “What has your lack of stamina got to do with getting used to this world?”

“Kay is right! That’s why I need to ride a horse!”

“You actually admitted it!”

The witches laughed out loudly.

Naga shook his head in resignation, pulled himself together and instructed the witches: “Anyway, let’s end the discussion for the night, we will need to move at day break.”

After concluding the meeting, Naga exited the inn, accompanied by Harlequin and Ixine.

8

Naga, Ixine, and Harlequin walked towards the stables behind the inn. Since no one else was around, they wore their usual attire. Once they put on the revealing clothes of the witches, the tattoos on Ixine's skin was eye catching even in the middle of the night.

Speaking of which, I heard that Ixine could manipulate the tattoos on her skin, what does that mean?

Naga was thinking about that when Ixine suddenly said:

"Naga."

"What is it?"

"We don't know each other, why are you doing so much for us?"

"We are not strangers anymore."

"Eh~~ I will put this another way. Back then, we didn't know each other, why did you do so much for us?"

"Because I owed you all the debt of one meal and a night's lodging."

"This is too much for just a meal and a night's lodging. No matter how I see it, the burden on your shoulders is heavy—— Or rather, too heavy."

Naga didn't answer Ixine's question, but looked up into the night sky; Darkness had shrouded the surroundings. Witches had excellent eyesight, so they didn't need torches. Ixine held a torch for Naga to light the ground. Thousands of stars twinkled in the clear night sky. Compared to the vague memory Naga had of the stars, the starlight was brighter here and more numerous.

"Now that you asked… I don't know why I am going so far for you all too. Just that after listening to Yuuki and Raibach's story, I had an idea—"

Naga continued looking at the sky and said calmly:

“— If I can conquer the world, maybe I can reduce the number of families with terrible deaths like Yuuki’s and Raibach’s…. If there are less people who are like this, there will be less people who will live sad lives, right? So I want to build a peaceful world, and reduce the number of such people. I think this is my responsibility and duty…. Maybe this is the reason.”

“Oh.”

Ixine opened her eyes wide and observed Naga’s profile.

It wasn’t clear if Harlequin heard what the two of them were saying, she squatted down not too far ahead, and patted the heads of the stray dogs that came near.

“What a grand ambition, I can’t keep up.”

“Is that so? I don’t think it is too great.”

“How should I say this, maybe our perspectives are different, or maybe our vision is different, or the way we see things is different.”

Naga laughed and turned his head back.

“It doesn’t matter what it is, I am doing this to help voluntarily. Although my actions caused you to shoulder a heavy burden.”

“Oh, don’t worry, we don’t mind. The burden might be heavy, but we look forward to living in a different world… probably. It feels like if we follow Naga, we will see a scene and world we have never experienced before.”

“A world you have never seen before.”

Naga smiled deviously.

“Even if that place is hell?”

“If we are hunted into extinction by humans, it will also be hell.”

Ixine had a refreshing smile, as if she was opposing Naga.

“Either way leads to hell, it will be more interesting to visit a new hell.”

“You have an interesting way of saying this.”

“Is it? I don’t think so. Harrigan-Nee, Ais, and the others have a similar way of

thinking, or they wouldn't be fighting the humans alongside Naga."

"Really?"

"It's true, it's true. So you don't need to worry. If anyone of us dies in battle, you don't need to push the blame on yourself."

Naga looked at Ixine in surprise.

"You are really considerate, Ixine."

"Huh? R-Really? People always say that."

Ixine smiled shyly as she scratched her head.

"Oh, a lot of people told you that?"

"Although I'm usually the one who is saying it."

"So you are saying that yourself!"

"Because no one else is saying it, so I have to say it myself."

Heehee, Ixine had an embarrassed smile.

"I will say it again, you are really considerate, Ixine."

"Heehee."

BAWW

Ixine lowered her gaze and smiled with her face flushed.

“Eh, what are you two doing? Let’s go.”

Tch, Harlequin really spoiled the mood, the atmosphere between Naga and me was so good.

Ixine swore in secret, then raised her hand and replied: “We will be right there~”

“Let’s go, Naga.”

“Okay. Oh yah, Ixine, I heard you can manipulate the tattoos on your skin, what does that mean?”

“Ah, speaking of which, you haven’t seen my magic.”

Ixine turned her body towards Naga and pointed at a tattoo.

“Simply said, this is like Cu’s belts. Look, it can move like this.”

Ixine extended her right arm.

“Summon imperial souls, dancing gleefully, no obstruction, rewards, boundary, righting all wrongs.”

The tattoos on Ixine’s arm started to squirm.

They gathered at the front of her arm, and then disappeared.

“Go.”

With a wave, the tattoos that had gathered on her palm seemed to have a life of their own when it fell to the ground, and then bound Naga’s legs.

“Waahhh!”

Naga attempted to shake away the tattoos, but they entangled his pants and were climbing up slowly.

“W-What is going on!?”

“Alright, come back.”

Ixine commanded, and the tattoos slid down and left the pants, and came back to Ixine’s legs and climbed up. Ixine placed her right hand on her thigh, and the tattoos moved onto her arm, back to their original position.

“Something like this. I can use it to entangle the opponent’s body with the tattoos and stop their movement. I can also strangle their neck.”

“T-This is amazing.”

“This is strong in single combat, but not very useful in fighting the humans.”

“That’s not true.”

“Hey! What are the two of you doing!?”

“Ahh, sorry, we will be right over.”

Ixine waved at Harlequin and started running.

All of them possess amazing skills, if their talents are utilized well, I believe we can form a powerful army. It’s a pity that we lack numbers, if we have the forces… Seems like we have to increase the number of human soldiers.

Naga thought as he jogged after Ixine.

After checking that the carriages were fine, the three of them left the guard duty to the strays and returned to the inn.

9

The next morning—

The witches and Naga prepared breakfast in a hurry and ate quickly, then started preparations to set off. As it is a street performance, there wasn't much to prepare. Everyone just needed to wear their costumes and take the flutes, drums, and string instruments, which didn't take much time.

Naga and Raibach waited in the room for them to change, and Ais came to their room to call for them.

Wahh! Ais' clothing!

Naga was shocked by Ais' attire the moment he left the room.

Her bountiful breasts were covered by a small piece of cloth, just barely. Frilly accessories were placed on her arms and waist, and a thin rope was wrapped around her hips; it wasn't clear if she really wanted to cover up. The exposed skin and face were painted with beautiful patterns and she wore a beautiful hair accessory on her head. On her hands were sparkling gems and glittering silver bangles, displaying the elegance, beauty, and exposure of a dancer.

"Erm… What's the matter?"

Ais asked, and Naga finally came to his senses.

"Nothing… Really… What an amazing dancer."

"What? What do you mean?"

Ais appeared confused, and Naga explained to her with a smile:

"I mean your beauty is astonishing."

"Huhhh, a-a-are you serious?"

"Am I right, Raibach?"

“Y-Yes. We will definitely make money; you are sexier than a real dancer~”

“You jest, Raibach!”

The embarrassed Ais patted Raibach’s shoulder hard, making him fall onto the floor screaming.

“Everyone is waiting for you in the room, come over quickly.”

Ais ran out of the corridor after saying that.

She looked naked from the back. No, she is as good as naked from the front too.

Naga thought as he watched Ais’ shaking hips.

“That hurts.”

Raibach nursed his shoulder and stood up with a painful groan.

“Ais’ brute force is dangerous, if she doesn’t learn to control her strength, she might just break my bones.”

“Alright, let’s go. I wonder how the other witches are dressed, how exciting.”

“You will lose your life if you are not subtle about it.”

Raibach advised.

“That’s true, let’s observe discreetly.”

“Eh, peeking at them sneakily is dangerous too.”

Naga walked towards the large room where the witches were gathered, and Raibach said quietly with a face of resignation behind him: “… Although I can empathize with you.”

10

After Naga and Raibach entered the large room, they realized it was heaven. Angels gathered within, and all of them were nearly naked.

Just like Ais, they wore thin and small pieces of clothes, and put on elegant accessories. Patterns were drawn on their bodies with dyes and smeared on their faces. They also dyed their hair and had arm and leg bangles. Some of the witches didn't cover their chest, only concealing their nipples with paint. Naga and Raibach forgot all about discreet observation and stared at the bold appearance of the witches with eyes wide open. At this moment, Kay, who only had a thin piece of rope on her chest and waist approached them.

"How is it? Does it suit us? Pretty enough?"

Seeing Kay striking poses, Naga looked at her from head to toe.

It's a pity, more accurately speaking, it's regrettable, especially the chest area.

But he can't vocalize his true thoughts, and only gave a vague answer:

"Ah~ yes, very sexy!"

"Naga, why do you sound so insincere!?"

"No, no such thing. Ais, Lela, Cu, Nonoel, and Ixine are all so charming that it makes my head spin."

"Why did you only leave me out!?"

"Don't be depressed, Kay."

"Ais is consoling so arrogantly!"

Kay lowered her head dejectedly.

"Alright, alright."

"Don't mind it, Kay."

When she heard Linne and Linna's consolations, Kay showed a dissatisfied look.

"Linne and Linna don't need to be dancers, that's why you aren't concerned~ Both of you don't need to reveal your child like bodies to everyone."

"You can show off your pitifully flat chest then, Kay" x2

The twins retorted as one.

As Naga was laughing heartily, Vita walked over. Her body didn't have any contours, and didn't look sexy in her revealing attire, but had a unique air about her. The tall Dona beside her had bountiful breasts, making the two of them look like parent and child.

"Naga, how do we look?"

"Raibach and I were just talking about this, all of you are sexier than real dancers."

"That's right, huh."

Except for some of the witches.

"Hmm? You want to say something?"

"No, I have nothing to say. Right, let's find a place to perform."

"True. Hey, Dona, Lily, time to go."

"Yes dear mother."

"Everyone ready?"

"We are ready, Ais."

"Let's be off."

"Good, the Najunkray troupe is going to have its first performance."

"Yes—!" x4

11

After linking the horse to the carriage, Naga jumped onto the driver's seat. Linne and Linna came to him to report: "We are going to the streets."

"I'm counting on you."

The twins left the inn quietly.

"I will drive."

Raibach said and sat down besides Naga, taking the reins.

"Everyone try to look lively on the way there."

Ais, who was standing beside the carriage, said to everyone.

"Got it—"

"I will work, hard."

"Of course."

"Leave it to me."

The witches responded and acknowledged by raising their hand.

"Alright, let's go Raibach."

On Naga's instruction, Raibach tugged the reins lightly, urging the horses forward. The wheels of the carriage rattled as they turned.

As the carriage advanced, all around the carriage, half naked— more accurately speaking almost entirely naked— dancers followed.

"We are the Najunkray troupe—"

"The performance is about to begin—"

"Please watch our performance if you have time—"

"We will perform a dance— a lively dance show—"

“P-Please watch, our show.”

The dancers advertised the performance and called out to the pedestrians, telling them about the show the troupe would be putting up.

All the dancers were beauties, and they wore thin, short, revealing clothes, which drew the attention of the crowd. A few onlookers were already following behind them. Ais chatted with the curious audience, asking them about a suitable venue to perform. She then reported her findings to Naga: “Alright, let’s head over there.”

Naga replied, and looked towards the back of Ais who returned to the crowd — her almost bare ass— and felt impressed.

She takes great care of people and treats others kindly, just like a big sister in the neighborhood kind of feeling. She can talk normally with humans, and is dependable in such situations. A pity that her character changes once she has a drink. But…

There were witches like Yuuki, who extremely hate men, but there were also witches like Ais, who could interact normally with humans. Most witches were not good at interacting with humans, but the lack of experience plays a large part.

If they come into contact with me and Raibach frequently, they will get used to humans one day. Harrigan’s witches are much more used to it now, and they will have even more chances to do so in the future. The witches aren’t much of an issue, the problem lies with… the humans.

Raibach accepted the existence of the witches rather swiftly, but that’s because he wasn’t a stanch believer in religion. People like him were in the minority, and most humans were devout believers who wouldn’t acknowledge the existence of witches easily, or accept coexistence with witches.

This can’t be done overnight, seems like I have to force them to accept it. But that’s something for the future.

The pressing matter was to resolve the issue at hand— the war with the Kasandora Kingdom. It was hard to tell from the current situation how long the war would last. Normal people wouldn’t have the leisure to think about the

future once they'd committed all their efforts to the obstacle before them. But Naga could set his sights on the long term while facing the difficulties right in front of him.

In other words, his tactical and strategic abilities were better than others.

Naga's next move was made to set up for a situation that would occur dozens of moves later.

In Naga's eyes, the situation a dozen steps later would be the founding of the nation of witches.

In order to do this, I need to find a way to take care of the war with the Kasandora Kingdom, and destroying that Kingdom isn't necessary. Okay, is there any way to break through the current stalemate?

Naga fell into deep thought as the carriage swayed.

Naga still had no idea about Granvista mustering an army to campaign against the witches. But he would find out about it in the near future

12

Under the lead of Ais, the group came to the plaza; Naga ordered for the carriage to stop.

After alighting from the carriage, he checked the surroundings and found a large group had gathered. He then ordered Ais: “Okay, we will perform here. Start the preparations.”

The preparations were finished after taking the instruments out and the dancers taking their positions.

The ones playing the instruments were Lela, Nonoel, Lily, Vita, and Harlequin. The ones dancing were Ais, Cu, Ixine, Kay, and Dona. The witches decided to group themselves this way after discussing it the night before.

“It’s a pity that I can’t see Lela dance.”

Naga said so to Lela, who was holding a flute. She answered with a sour face:

“I don’t really want to dance with those people, so it’s, fine.”

When he heard that, Naga looked at the dancers in the center of the open space.

Ais, Cu, Ixine, Kay, and Dona.

He then turned to the musicians.

Lela, Nonoel, Lily, Vita, and Harlequin.

“I get it, you are separated by size, except for Kay.” Naga muttered.

He didn’t mention what the size was referring to, but it’s obvious with a glance.

“I have a rough idea about why you don’t want to join them.”

Lela drooped her shoulders and nodded weakly in response.

Is this the reason why Vita, who wanted to dance, is now playing an instrument?

At this moment, Vita glared at Naga fiercely.

“I don’t know what you are thinking about, but that’s not the real reason, definitely not.”

You let it slip!

Naga wanted to retort, but managed to endure it.

By the way, Kay is brave as usual, almost to the point of foolhardiness.

The exposed twin peaks were shaking everywhere, only, Kay had nothing to shake. But she still puffed her chest out without minding it at all, standing tall in her corner.

Well, it’s fine if she doesn’t mind.

The dancers lined up in the open space, Ais, who was in the middle, raised her hand.

“Alright— Let’s begin—”

When they heard the cue, the witches started playing their instruments. The dancers started to move their bodies elegantly when the music started.

The audience clapped and cheered loudly.

The dancers started slow, and as the beat got faster, their movements became more vigorous.

All the dancers have large breasts (except Kay).

And their clothes barely covered their bodies.

The more intense their dance, the larger the movement of their upper bodies.

Their upper bodies shook (except Kay).

Wobbling intensely (except Kay).

Jiggling violently (except Kay).

The small pieces of cloth covering their chest — which did a poor job of concealing their bodies —seem to be on the verge of flying off.

Their lower bodies were moving vividly, the string like costumes might fall off at any instance.

The eyes of the audience followed every move of the dancers, they were definitely urging with their mind, saying— Fall off! Slip off now!

Naga wasn't an exception.

Damn, why aren't they falling off? Why won't it slip? Did they stick it on with glue? Or is this magic?

Naga thought the same way as most of the audience.

The eyes of the audience were intense, focusing on the bodies that were more revealing than half naked, but not to the extent of being totally nude. They were absorbed in the intense dance. The atmosphere was heated, and spurred by the excitement, some members of the audience stood up and cheered.

The tune changed again and the dancers' movements shifted, slow at times, fast in others, and exotic music was played every now and then. No matter what type of music it was, the dancers performed splendidly.

Amazing, this isn't like the performance of amateurs. As expected of people that will strip and dance in every celebration party, it's out of this world.

Naga felt impressed with devious intentions.

Claps, cheers and people beating a beat with their hands brought the atmosphere to the boiling point.

The tune intensified and the fast and frantic actions of the dancers dazzled the eyes of the audience below the stage— It was unfathomable why their clothes didn't fall off.

Then the music ended abruptly, the dancers also stopped moving.

The dancers maintained their positions before the music stopped, then slowly relaxed their bodies and bowed to the audience in appreciation.

The audience finally came to their senses and applauded thunderously, even Naga couldn't help clapping his hands.

The dancers were covered in sweat, waving, and bowing to the audience with

all smiles in return.

Yes, amazing, this standard is worthy of making the audience cough up their money.

While Naga was feeling impressed, he felt his flank being poked. Naga turned and found Lela looking up at him.

“What are you looking, at?”

“Hmm? Nothing, I’m not looking at anything.”

Liar.

Lela looked at Naga with eyes of disdain.

“Speaking of which, you didn’t dance in the end.”

“That’s because…”

Lela glanced at Ais and the other dancers, then averted her eyes.

“I am not brave enough to join, them.”

“Kay did.”

“Because she has no sense of, shame.”

Naga agreed with this in his heart.

She is someone who will do warm ups naked before swimming.

“Forget about Kay, I really want to see you dancing with them.”

Naga said as he scrutinized Lela’s outfit. Lela, who played music, was dressed like the dancers, more revealing than being half naked, but not totally nude. She showed a lot of skin, but it wasn’t that much compared to her usual clothes. But Lela couldn’t help feeling bashful with Naga staring at her like that.

“Eh…”

Lela’s face turned red as she lowered her head.

“I will… work hard next, time.”

“I’m looking forward to it.”

Lela felt her body burning up and didn’t raise her head.

The dancers moved between the crowd with woven bamboo baskets in hand. The audience gave their copper coins freely. The dancers picked up the copper coins on the ground amidst the loud applause, but one of the witches was moving really clumsily.

“What is Cu doing… She dropped the basket and spilled the coins again! Why is she so uncoordinated?”

Having no choice, Naga got down from the stage to help, and approached Cu.

“Eh, you seem to be having a hard time.”

Cu, who was leaning forward and reaching out with her hands to pick up the coins, lifted her head.

“Ah, Naga… this is hard.”

“What? What is hard?”

If you always speak only a few words, it will be hard to know what you are saying.

Naga thought as he bent his knees and reached for the coins on the ground.

“Is picking up coins hard?”

Cu shook her head with a sad expression.

When she shakes her head, her body will move. Seeing it up close, her body is a dangerous weapon. The costumes of dancers are already fierce, this further enhances her destructive power.

Naga fell into a dilemma, wondering if he should avert his eyes. In the end, his eyes were focused on only one spot.

“It’s hard to hold the heavy basket.”

“What? What do you mean?”

Naga shifted his eyes from Cu’s bountiful peaks and valley in a hurry.

“I-Is it that heavy? There’s only a few coins in there, right?”

“I will usually carry things with my belts.”

“Ahh! So that’s why.”

In other words, because Cu had always used magic to manipulate her belts, she didn’t have many chances to carry things with her own hands.

“I have never carried anything heavier than a plate.”

“Are you a princess from somewhere?”

“Just joking.”

“Oh, I see.”

“But carrying heavy things is difficult.”

“That’s not heavy…”

“It will be easy if I use my belts, I can carry a dozen or two no problem.”

Naga watched Cu placed the basket with coins onto her knees as she picked up the coins, and couldn’t help but lament: I don’t understand how these witches think.

“It’s hard to perform too.”

“Is that so? You danced quite well.”

“Not the dance, but the clothes.”

I don’t get it, what does she mean?

Naga had a confused look on his face. Noticing his baffled gaze, Cu explained:

“I usually have belts around my body. Without the belts, it is hard to balance my body.”

“Really?”

Cu nodded.

“Having belts on my body is as good as having magic around me. Without the belts, I feel naked, that’s why this costume feels embarrassing.”

“I see, but to me, there isn’t much difference for you to wear belts or dress like

this.”

“Totally different, even if I have just one belt on me, I will feel more at ease.”

Just one belt will put you at ease… Then just wear one belt in the future then, Cu.

Naga decided to hide this suggestion in the bottom of his heart.

“Everyone is done picking up the money, let’s hurry.”

Naga picked up the coins swiftly and placed them in Cu’s basket.

“Thank you…”

“You are welcome, let’s go.”

“I’m not done yet.”

“It’s just a little, so leave it. Our objective is not to earn money through dancing, but collecting intelligence.”

Cu nodded, and stood up unsteadily with the bamboo basket in her arms.

She is stumbling around. Her body movements are really unsteady without her belts.

Naga was impressed and dumbfounded.

The audience dispersed, and as Naga and company were preparing to return to the inn, Linne and Linna, who wore cloaks, walked over.

13

“Heard any noteworthy news?” Naga asked quietly.

The two of them were on the other side of the open space, and won’t be able to hear Naga’s voice normally. The two of them kept a close watch on the crowd and approached Naga nonchalantly. When they passed by Naga, they answered his question.

“I heard that there is going to be a huge battle with the witches soon.”

A battle involving the witches!?

“That…”

He only said that much before remembering that they were still in the plaza.

There is still an audience here, this place isn’t suitable for talks. We should head back to the inn first.

Naga adopted the demeanor of a troupe leader, gathered all the dancers, and announced to them in a low voice.

“Linne and Linna seemed to have heard something, let’s head back to the inn for now.”

The dancers kept the instruments and coins they picked up hurriedly, placed them inside the carriage, and returned to the inn.

14

Everyone gathered in the large room where Ais and the others were staying in. Naga asked the twins: “What did you hear?”

“Not just the conversations of the audience, we also heard what the crews at the harbor were talking about.”

After saying that, Linne and Linna told everyone the intelligence they found out.

“I see…”

After hearing their report, Naga crossed his arms with a heavy expression.

The other witches seemed to be pondering about the news.

“There’s an army gathering at Granvista …?”

“They number about three to four thousand, a grand scale.”

Ais said with furrowed brows:

“The question is, why are they gathering an army? Are they launching a campaign against us just like the rumors said…? That should be the reason right, Naga?” Vita asked.

“Yes, I think you are right.”

“Hmm, since they made a move, what should we do?”

“… We will need to hurry up.”

“Hurry what up?”

“We need to hurry and head for the capital of the Kasandora Kingdom, and find out the relationship between the Kasandora Kingdom and the army sent to subjugate the witches.”

When Naga said that, Lela expressed her doubt with a “Hmm?”

“Normally speaking, the army would head south towards Kasandora kingdom to link up. But maybe Kasandora kingdom didn’t have anything to do with this army either, right?”

As expected of Lela, a detailed observation.

“That might be possible, but if the Kasandora Kingdom knew a large army would be coming to reinforce them, they wouldn’t have sent a thousand soldiers to attack the fort.”

“Oh, that’s true.”

The actual fact was a bit different. Kasandora Kingdom already knew a subjugation army would be heading for them. At the same time, they were coerced by Cardinal Aiba to dispatch troops to attack alone. The facts were slightly off, but Naga had analyzed the subtle relationship between Kasandora Kingdom and the subjugation army correctly.

“It is suspicious for Kasandora to seal the city (capital), maybe they overestimated the prowess of the witches and fear your attacks. But there wasn’t a need to seal the city with such a large army coming to support them.”

“Eh… Maybe the Kasandora Kingdom is levying taxes and provisions for the army, but the travelers and merchants misunderstood it as preparations to seal the city… Is that, possible?”

Lela picked up the main issue and has a keen sense of observation.

Naga nodded in agreement.

“We can’t dismiss this possibility, providing provisions is the responsibility of the host nation… Am I right, Raibach?”

“Yes, that’s basically true. But if the church grants their support, they will also provide provisions for the participating forces. They can’t feed the troops with just God’s blessings alone.”

At this point, Vita leaned forth.

“The intentions of the Kasandora Kingdom are a concern, but something bothers me, Naga.”

Naga looked at Vita and saw her exceptionally serious face.

“What is it? Your face is really grim. Something bothering you?”

“The news mentioned that the army mustering in Granvista is the elites of the church… right?”

“They did mention that. They are not the forces of another nation, but serve the church directly right? What about them?”

“That would be terrible, the units serving under the church are known as the ‘Army of God’ or ‘Holy Crusaders’, they are trained to fight heretics and the enemies of the church, and to subjugate the witches. If they send out this unit, it would be a tough battle.”

As he listened to the frowning Vita’s response, Naga clicked his tongue.

“Tch, just like the warrior monks.[1]”

“Warriors monks? What are warrior monks?”

“Ah? Did I say something?”

“Huh? Didn’t you just say it? You didn’t realize?”

“S-Sorry, I don’t remember.”

Naga scratched his head with a troubled look. Ais spoke up to smoothen the awkward situation.

“Sometimes, Naga will speak about strange things. It’s actually not that weird, probably things related to his old world.”

“Hmm, so he said that because of a memory or experience he had forgotten?”

“That’s it, so don’t mind me.”

Naga said nonchalantly, while Vita made a suspicious expression.

“You should be more concerned about this right?”

“Well, no matter how concerned I am, I can’t remember the things that I can’t remember. I have already given up.”

“How resolute.”

“Instead of myself, the most important thing right now is the affairs of you witches.”

“That’s true.”

“What should we do, Naga? Shall we change our plans in accordance to the news Linne and Linna heard?”

Ais asked, and Naga moaned.

“I said earlier that we need to hasten our pace. Anyway, our debut performance is over. After the city gates open at daybreak tomorrow, we will leave this place and head for the Kasandora Kingdom. Since Fort Ein is along the way, we will stop by there and discuss this with Harrigan, maybe she heard some news there.”

Vita laughed:

“So we were supposedly chased out of the Fort that’s held by the witches, right?”

“That’s right, the setting will be that after being chased out by the witches, we hurried on towards the capital of Kasandora.”

“Guess we can’t buy more resources or practice our performance.” Ais said.

“That can’t be helped, after all… Though we have heard of stupid haste in war. [2]”

“Oh, is there such an idiom?”

“There is, I remember this is by… Sunko?”

“Who knows, don’t ask me.”

Vita retorted, which made Naga scratch his head.

My knowledge… specifically speaking, my memories are just fragmented pieces, it can’t be helped that I can’t build it into a complete picture. It’s the same for this incident too, I can’t see the entire picture. If going to the Kasandora Kingdom fills in the missing pieces, I can recreate the silhouette of the entire war and see the big picture clearly. Maybe I can find a way to handle it then.

Naga pulled himself together and announced to the witches and Raibach:

“In order to save our energy for tomorrow, it’s regrettable, but we have to

stop the sightseeing and shopping for today.”

15

The next morning—

Before the break of dawn, everyone was ready and headed towards the city gates.

After the city gates opened, the group left Lancel city and headed along the path besides the Schweiz River. Few people took this route in recent times, and it appears abandoned. Fortunately, it was just wide enough for carriages to pass through, and the group hurried along.

They camped outdoors along the way, and passed by the place of the previous battle the next afternoon.

The Heindler witches and Naga fought the Kasandora army here. Raibach wasn't present during that battle, but he still felt nostalgic as he took part in the campaign.

Watching the barren surroundings, Raibach was reminded of his recent experience.

In the beginning, I was unhappy about being demoted to the supply unit, but if I was leading the company during that battle, I would probably have died here. In hindsight, I am alive because of that, a blessing in disguise. In the end, General Geobalk took responsibility for the loss and resigned, and General Guiscard took over. He re-appointed me as a company captain, and ordered me to keep watch over the Schweiz River.

When his train of thought reached this point, Raibach looked cautiously at Naga and the witches.

I thought I was down on my luck back then and cursed my experience, in the end, I met Naga and the witches, and came to this place. What a strange fate, I thought I was unlucky, but I wasn't that unlucky after all. I thought I was lucky,

but I wasn’t that lucky too. Life is full of twists and turns.

Raibach sat on the carriage looking over at the river some distance away and felt melancholic.

16

After leaving the Schweiz River, Naga and the group followed the road up north to Fort Ein.

By dusk, they met two witches, who were patrolling outside the Fort, and returned to Fort Ein before dark.

Naga immediately sought out Harrigan and began a discussion.

17

"… So Linne and Linna found out about this in Lancel City. Any news from your side?"

"The news that Kasandora is sealing the city (capital) should be true."

After hearing the news from Naga, that was the first thing Harrigan said.

"So you heard something that confirms this information?"

"That's right, I'd sent Yuuki to scout the vicinity of Kasandora's capital, and she saw them stockpiling provisions and reinforcing the walls, and strengthening the forts in the surroundings. We didn't know why they are doing this, but after you brought back this news, everything makes sense."

"So that's why they are not only stockpiling provisions, but also reinforcing the city walls and forts. From the looks of it, it is true that they are preparing to seal the city."

"But Naga, are they doing this as a precaution against us? Or are they defending against…"

Naga nodded deeply when Vita pointed this out.

"The army that is gathering in Granvista … Kasandora is probably doing this in defense against that army."

"From the intelligence we've gathered so far, that should be the case. But how did this come to be?"

Vita was baffled, and it wasn't a surprise that she reacted that way.

"I don't get it either, seems like we need to infiltrate the Kasandora Kingdom."

"In that case— Harrigan looked at Naga and Vita with expectant eyes: "I have no choice but to go right?"

"You need to stay here and supervise."

“Vita is right, Harrigan. Only you can watch this place. If you leave, who can cover for you?”

“Eh, A-Ais can…”

“Ais is capable, but she lacks the experience to command a fort.”

“That’s right, I’m just an insignificant person who doesn’t have the experience.”

Ais, who was present for the meeting, said so with a smile, and Harrigan glared at her immediately.

“This girl will only say she lacks experience when the situation benefits her.”

Harrigan turned her head back immediately with a serious expression.

“But I haven’t visited a human city for so long, it’s too sly that only you all can go.”

“You finally said what you were really thinking.”

“Shut up. Vita went to Lancel, now it’s my turn.”

“Even if you say that, most of the witches here are from your clan. Normally speaking, the commander with the most troops will take command right?”

“W-What about Naga staying behind?”

“Ehh? Don’t be ridiculous, Harrigan.”

“That’s right, if Naga is here, how can we carry out the gathering of intelligence?”

“… I get it. I’m just throwing out ideas.”

Harrigan replied unhappily.

“Just bear with it a little bit longer, Harrigan. In the future, you can visit a human city whenever you want.”

“What do you mean, Naga?”

“We will rule a human nation one day; you can go wherever you wish then.”

“Huh… I-Is that so?”

“In order to achieve this goal, we have to collect more intelligence. The accuracy and amount of data will decide a battle sometimes. No, it will definitely affect the entire battle. So if we want to win the next battle, we have to collect intelligence thoroughly. But if we lose this fort, it would be a huge blow, so please stay and watch the fort.”

Naga said these words sincerely with a serious expression. Harrigan sighed softly and muttered: “Alright.”

“I’m just saying it, don’t worry. I will perform my duties, so you have to complete your tasks too.”

Naga relaxed the expression on his face and replied: “Yes, we will.”

“How about buying a present for you, the weapons and jewelries sold for an unexpectedly high price after all. What do you want? A comb? A mirror? Or both?”

“What do you mean it’s fine to buy both, Vita, this money was made by selling the Heindler clan’s goods in the first place!”

“Hmm… That’s true.”

“I can’t let my guard down when dealing with you.”

“Don’t be mad, we will hold back when buying gifts for ourselves.”

“You want to buy a present for yourself!?”

Harrigan retorted, then turned to face Ais.

“Ais, keep a close eye on the money we got from selling the items.”

“Yes Onee-san, I will watch it.”

“This fort is probably being watched. We can’t stay long, so let’s set off soon.”

“That’s true. They’re a bit far, but there’s a scouting unit somewhere around here.”

“After we leave the fort, throw some rocks at us.”

“We don’t need to go that far right?”

“This is to be safe. We won’t lose anything if you do it, so put up an act.”

“As you wish.”

Harrigan nodded, and Vita reminded her:

“Don’t throw too hard.”

“You don’t need to tell me that… No, Vita, I do want to throw rocks at you really hard.”

“How long are you going to be such a pain?”

“I’m half joking, don’t take it too seriously.”

“So you are half serious, of course I will be concerned!”

“Alright, let’s go, Vita, Ais, Lela.”

On the urging by Naga, the three of them acknowledge and stood up.

18

The traveling troupe that visited the fort was chased out by the witches mercilessly…. Under such a setting, Naga's group left the forest and followed the road heading north.

When they reached a fortress near the capital of Kasandora, they were stopped by the guards.

19

“Where did you come from, and where are you going?”

Naga answered the soldier’s question without reservation, but to them, his words sounded fuddled.

“We came from Lancel, heading to capital, to perform.”

Seeing the performers lined up in a row, the soldiers narrowed their eyes and some of them showed lusty gazes. As they were close to the capital of the Kasandora Kingdom, all the witches put on their dancing costumes, which were small and thin pieces of clothing.

“I am leader, they troupe dance girls. May we have honor to perform for you?”

Before they reached the fort, Naga asked Lela if she could lower the effectiveness of the talisman used for communication. Because he believed that if he couldn’t communicate well, it would give the impression of being a foreigner. Lela said she could do so and weakened the talisman’s effect. That’s why he didn’t sound fluent to other people.

“I see, it would be great to watch a performance.”

One soldier said with a laugh, but the others gave a warning.

“Eh, now is not the time to watch a show, the captain will lecture us!”

“Oh, t-that’s true.”

The soldier coughed and faced Naga again.

“It is regrettable, but even though you have travelled all the way here, it is probably not possible to hold a performance even if you enter the capital.”

“Huh? Not possible?”

“War is going to break out, the citizens in the capital are probably not in the mood to enjoy a performance.”

“Huhh?”

Naga made a show of being surprised. He then lowered his voice, leaned in and asked the soldier: “Could it be… your country is going to war with the witches? I heard about that in Lancel.”

“No, that’s not it.”

Naga faked his surprise and looked confused.

“If not, who else would you be fighting a war against?”

The soldier lowered his voice and replied.

“The enemies are forces attempting to invade our nation. So it’s fine if you want to head to the capital, but there’s no guarantee you can perform.”

Naga made a show of being depressed and drooped his shoulders. Naga was surprisingly good at acting, and was actually gleeful in his heart.

Now we can confirm that the Kasandora Kingdom won’t work together with the witch subjugation army!

“Don’t be so depressed, there is no telling when they will hit, so you might have the chance to perform for a few days.”

“Then, we hurry and go, okay?”

“Go on then.”

The soldier nodded, but a voice stopped them.

“Hold on.”

The captain of the unit heard a traveling troupe was here, and rushed over with a few underlings.

“Good day, captain.”

The soldier conversing with Naga saluted the Captain.

“You said you came from Lancel, so you walked along the Schweiz River, turned midway and headed here?”

“Yes, correct.”

“Did you passed by a fort along the way? Anything happened when you went

to it?”

“We wanted to perform since it’s on the way, but witches take fort, chase us out.”

After Naga replied, the Captain and the others changed their expressions.

“Hurry and tell us the details!”

“But I want reach capital soon, or else cannot perform.”

“Just a few questions, won’t take too long.”

“Oh, then fine.”

“What are the witches in the fort doing?”

Naga already expected them to ask this, so he gave his prepared answer.

“I see them fix wall, fix tower. Not too sure, never go in.”

“Okay, how many witches are there?”

“Eh…” Naga pretended to think. “Five or six came out for us, and some fix wall, but I already said I never go in, don’t know how many…”

“Did you see any men?”

“Well, I didn’t.”

Naga answered as he worked hard to suppress his laughter. The ‘man’ they were asking about was him.

“I didn’t see.”

The Captain conversed quietly with his subordinates.

“Alright, I will send soldiers to escort you to the capital.”

Naga was surprised by the Captain’s suggestion.

“I feel safe if soldier escort, but fine?”

“I want you to meet the commander in the capital, and tell him what you just said.”

“Ahh, I see.”

I see, he wants to get information about the witches from us directly. Instead

of sending a messenger, this would be a better way. We saw Fort Ein under the control of the witches with our own eyes, and are valuable eyewitnesses to them.

“I understand.”

Naga lowered his head in acknowledgement, but in his heart, he was sticking his tongue out happily.

“I will get some escorts over immediately, please wait here for a moment.”

“Yes, we will.”

We can get into Kasandora Kingdom more smoothly than expected, a good sign.

And like this, the Najunkray traveling troupe headed for the capital, led by the Kasandora soldiers.

Chapter 4-Enemy and Ally, Both of their Circumstances

1

The royal capital of Kasandora Kingdom was a relatively large, fortified city located in the westernmost peninsula.

The city was 16 meters high and surrounded by a thick wall, with roughly 2000 people living inside.

However, the ‘2000’ people only included those citizens who were registered in the tax payment account book.

Naturally, noble families, servants, and slaves, who were exempted from paying taxes didn’t count, as well as travelers that had wandered in from other places to the city. It also excluded merchants who were temporarily staying.

Since nobody would bother to check that, no one really knew the total number of people. Still, shouldn’t it be fine to estimate the current population at around 4000?

The majority of these citizens were farmers, therefore, lots of them would set off early in the morning to their fields near the city’s outskirts, and return to the city before the sunset. There were also instances in which the farmers would stay overnight at their fields once it was harvest season.

They did so as to prevent the theft of their crops and to drive away any animals that would try to devour their crops, as it was natural for there to be no public safety outside the city, in this period. That’s why the farmers would arm

themselves and form groups to defend against robbers and animals.

The settlements of those farmers were reinforced with wooden fences, which resembled forts a bit. In case of slightly bigger settlements, there were even dry moats surrounding them.

Not to mention, these settlements would actually act as forts and house soldiers during times of emergency.

And then, it seemed like a 'time of emergency' had arrived for Kasandora. Their soldiers moved into a few of those large settlements while carrying army provisions and weapons. Some of these settlements were placed along the main road, so it was bound for Naga to witness them.

Naga drew near on his horse toward a soldier, who mounted his own one, and called out to him with a low voice.

"Uhm, Soldier-san."

The soldier turned around.

"I see great number of soldiers near fort. Could be, you preparing for battle?"

"That's, not really a fort, but well…"

"Yes?"

"Does it look like a fort to you from far away?"

Saying so, the soldier explained the aforementioned circumstances to Naga.

(Hmm, I see. So they use farmers' settlements as forts? Certainly, you can save time and costs on building them, but you really can't expect them to be strong in defense, right?) Is what Naga thought.

(Still, I don't quite understand the way how things in this world should be, like why a city and a castle are working as one. From where I come from, a castle should be a castle, whereas, a city should be a city. At least, a castle being a castle should be….. defense-wise, much stronger, but…) According to what Naga had heard from the witches, it didn't seem to be rare for everyone to be massacred during a war between different ethnic groups, as everyone, including citizens, merchants, and laborers dwelled inside the same city. Even if there wasn't any war, bandits and violent animals would roam near the outskirts, so,

people preferred to set up residence inside a city.

Nevertheless, such a principle of this world was still incomprehensible to Naga.

(What I can't comprehend the most is that there are beings called witches. Now, we can understand each other owing to the fact we've been living together, but….) Or it could be that the witches had accepted him due to his eccentric nature.

Realizing that he was a bit eccentric himself, Naga made a weak, curious smile at that and at the sarcasm of his placed position right now.

"Soldier-san."

He ceased to smiled and called out to the soldier.

"The citizens, does mean that citizens pick up weapons during siege?"

"Depends on how the battle progresses, however, that would also be the case. The citizens too, were trained to wield weapons, so to prepare themselves for a battle when necessary, you see."

"Are you, enrolling people, for army?"

"We are."

The soldier who replied so made a slightly bitter face.

"But, judging from how things looks like, it doesn't seem like we'll gather enough volunteers at a moment's notice…. No, it's nothing. Please forget what I've just said."

"Still, I no luck."

Naga said this as he looked up at the sky.

"If we no hold entertainment, we not be able to cover cost our travel to here, and therefore, return trip. Our troupe, fall into huge deficit."

As he declared this and breathed out a sigh, the soldier showed a compassionate face.

"I guess, even leaders of troupes have it difficult."

After that, the soldier lowered down his voice and asked.

“However, having such young and lovely girls by your side, there are probably lots of side benefits coming from that, right? With that many girls, wouldn’t you make a fortune, were you to assign them to a night job?”

“Ah no, we no do that. After all, we performers. People like us not lose dignity that way.”

“Hmm, is that so?”

Naga had the feeling the soldier would visit them right away as a guest, were he to do so. The soldier replied in a fed up manner.

(Well, certainly I’ll agree that those girls, all of them are beauties. Speaking of which, could it be that someone like me is incredibly lucky to be mixed up with all these girls? Ah no, how should it be? On the other hand, I can tell my life has been put at risk numerous times.) ‘Well, whatever.’ – Naga decided not to brood over that matter any longer. As he did so, the sight of the city, seen from the top of a small hill, had finally come into his view.

(I see. Certainly, it has an impact similar to that of a giant citadel when seen from close like this, unlike that port city.) Feeling admiration, Naga made a quick reckoning inside his head.

(Umm, so was it around 2000 soldiers in the garrison? And 2000 citizens? Assuming they recruit 500 additional soldiers from those citizens, the total number within their garrison would amount to 2500. If that’s the case, in order to capture the city, the enemy would need more than 10 thousand units. I see, it’s not like I don’t get why Kasandora wants to hole up, but…) However, Naga soon understood the drawback coming from such a heavy defense.

(The number of people holing up is way too big. If it’s like this, they will need to consume a large amount of army provisions. And that’s not including unregistered citizens. 5000, perhaps 6000, if that many people are going to hole up in the capitol, just how much army provisions would they require? Do they have enough to supply themselves for a long time? And then, the biggest problem would be about whether reinforcements would be coming or not……) Holing up, was, in the end, a defensive strategy adopted by those who couldn’t afford winning in the open field.

Naga didn’t know if the Kasandora Kingdom had any allies that could send

them reinforcements, but judging from what he had heard till now, it didn't look like there whereas any.

(Fumu, I wonder… if we could use this as an opportunity for something.)

As Naga was working his head off, their troupe kept closing the distance and finally reached the giant entrance of the city.

Once they crossed a bridge that spanned a dry moat, Naga dismounted his horse in front of the entrance.

Looking up from below, he could feel the actual size of the wall on his skin.

(Indeed, it's big. What's more, is it made from bricks? Or perhaps, it's a mud wall made from tightly packed earth and covered with bricks? Whichever it is, it seems to be firm. To begin with, was there a castle with such firmly built walls like this in my world?) Naga, whose memories were lost, couldn't say for sure, but, he felt he hadn't witnessed such a protective wall before in his life.

"Please wait here for a moment. I'll go and contact my superior."

The commanding officer went to the gate, in order to exchange some words with the guard on duty. As Naga saw him off, he looked up at the wall again.

(I wonder how should I capture such a heavily guarded city?)

As Naga pondered about that, the witches too, although they were female dancers in appearance, disembarked from the cart and gathered around him. They looked up at the massive wall just like Naga.

Apparently, there was a passage on top of the wall, in which people could walk on.

(Is the top of the wall this high, so as to prevent arrows from reaching it?)

Ais called out to Naga who was staring fixedly at the wall.

"It's big, isn't it? With this size and massiveness, it doesn't look like I can break it with just 1 or 2 hits."

(So you had such a plannn?!)

As he looked at Ais with an astonished face, she smiled back with a grin.

“Perhaps, 10 hits should be enough to do so.”

(This girl, she’s just like a human battering ram.)

Naga shivered with fear.

“I guess, it wouldn’t be easy for me to climb over these walls, even if someone was to throw me up.”

Vita stated this.

(So these girls too, have thought about ways on how to capture this city? How mindful of them.) ‘Kukuku.’ – Naga chuckled like this without himself realizing.

“What? Don’t you seem to be enjoying yourself?”

At Vita, who asked this question, Naga paid attention and lowered his voice.

“That’s just manner of speech, manner of speech.”

“I, Is that so?”

Uhen – Vita coughed and looked up again at Naga.

“You seem to be in a good mood, aren’t you, boss?”

“….This feel awfully, strange.”

As Naga muttered this, Vita kicked up at his calf.

“Aww! What you do if someone see us like this?!”

“Hmph, I made sure that nobody was looking at us.”

Vita’s tone returned back to its usual one.

“Hey, what are you laughing at?”

At Vita, who asked this question in a whispering manner, Naga replied while laughing.

“I, you, we both thought about capturing this city upon arriving. That, too funny.”

“What, you too? Well, I guess that’s the first thing you’d be thinking about in this kind of situation. Still, your manner of speech is way too unpleasant.”

Vita, who was observing the wall, shifted her gaze back at Naga while saying

this. As she did so, Ais also nodded in agreement.

“Right? It too, creeps me out a bit.”

“You saying, cruel things, Ais. It’s because of charm, so can’t be help.”

“Couldn’t you do something about it, Lela?

“Eh? But…. I think this way of talking suits a stranger, like Naga-san, Vita, san.”

“No, it’s nothing but gross.”

“Vita, you, worst.”

“Then, have you come up with any good ideas?”

“Right plan comes with the right number, but, for us, we not enough. Just coming up with way, hard. “

Hmph – Vita snorted under her nose.

“That’s some convenient reasoning coming from you.”

“I come up with something if can think calmly. More important, us return to officer.”

At Naga’s words, Vita assumed her usual, haughty attitude once more.

(She would truly be a cute kid with that peculiar face, and that attitude from before, but, well….) Naga thought so, however, by no means could he afford to let Vita know about that.

“Oi, Boss.”

Being called by the commanding officer, who had returned back, Naga drew near with a trot.

“Ligaya-sama said he would like to meet you.”

“Ligaya-sama, who that?”

“He’s the adjutant of our army’s supreme commander, Guiscard.”

(Again, quite a distinguished person has made their appearance, I guess.)

Naga displayed his astonishment in an exaggerated way, even though he was just a bit surprised.

“D, Do we really have to meet person of such eminence? I feeling nervous.”

The commander made a wry smile and replied:

“You don’t have to worry that much. It should be fine, as long as you can provide him with information about the fort of the witches. He may even reward you properly.”

“Thank you, very much.”

Bowing down respectfully, Naga thought this.

(I’m a surprisingly good actor, I guess. Speaking of which, things have become quite interesting.) Raising up his head, Naga turned around and called out to the female dancers.

“Everyone, let’s go, inside.”

The girls returned back to the cart(?) in a bustling manner and gathered around their boss as he took the reins again.

“Excellent, now follow me.”

Being led by the commander, Naga’s troupe passed through the big gate and stepped into the fortified city.

3

What appeared in front of them was a path that turned in a ‘ㄱ’ shape. Once they passed through it, there was a big main street running in the northern and southern direction. At some points of the ‘ㄱ’ shaped path, there were spare places used in case of emergency to cut off the passage. From the inside of the walls, where the path was bending, there were watchtowers put up.

(I see. This place was arranged in this way so that the watchtowers could intercept the enemy, even if they were to break through that giant gate and rush in.) Naga quickly saw through the mechanism of this place’s construction.

Certainly, those who would manage to storm in through the gate would be further hindered by this 2, no, 3-fold defense. It was also one of the methods to shoot down the enemy from above.

The enemy soldiers would crowd together inside this narrow passage while being unable to either hide or escape. A trap like this would produce heavy casualties.

On the other hand, the garrison that’s attacking from high above wouldn’t even have to expose themselves to the enemy. Because of that, the danger of incurring any losses is low. Not to mention, the garrison could also rely on throwing logs and pouring down boiling oil, causing huge damage to the enemy.

(Fumu. This might become a good reference.)

Naga would be troubled if he was asked where he get all those references from, despite him having lost his memory. However, he himself considered it vaguely as something intuitional when looking for a way to protect his own castle.

Exiting the place where the path was bending to the spacious main street, the troupe continued to head towards a castle.

Naga felt as if the number of people passing each other on the main road wasn't adequate to the scope of this city. Could it be that the merchants left the city after sensing the danger of a potential war? Once the rumors about a war spreads, it's natural for there to be less merchants visiting too. Obviously, with more merchants leaving than coming here, the number of people is bound to reduce inside the city.

(I guess there aren't many travelers as well, so it's likely the cost of services, such as renting a room in an inn, will rise. Speaking of which, we might be welcomed here, like outsiders are supposed to be, but, it doesn't seem like we'll have the spare time to stay in this city and do performances for long.) Apparently, some permanent stores were running their business as usual, but despite there being people passing by, not many customers could be seen inside.

There were also defensive walls, placed on the 4-way crossroads that were located between each block. When necessary, the walls would be closed so as to prevent enemy troops from further advancement. As expected, there were also watchtowers built there.

Naga would be suspected, were he to stare at the places too much, so instead, he observed the defensive facilities, in a casual, however, proper manner.

Finally, they arrived at the entrance leading to the inside of the castle.

The commander exchanged some words with the guard, after which they proceeded further inside.

(Indeed, we are lucky to have this guy assist us. Not only are we able to see the city but also the interior of the castle.) The pathway inside the castle wasn't straight, which was similar to what Naga and the rest had seen till now. It was meandering and complex, just like a maze, making them stop and turn from time to time. Where they didn't have to stop, there were defense zones that would hinder further movements when necessary.

As well as watchtowers raised here and there; the path was narrow and the wall was built on the edge, making it impossible for anyone to see what's next, less they drew near.

No matter how smart Naga was, it was difficult for him to grasp how the inside of this castle roped off. Still, he counted his steps and the number of corners

while walking.

The witches looked around with curious eyes, but, none of them would check how the interior stretched out, like Naga. Instead, they walked forward without a single care.

Soon after, the commander stopped and turned around, probably because they reached the right building.

What stood in front of them was a splendid, stone-made, 3 story building with a large garrison.

Naga perceived the garrison was full of well-equipped soldiers with high morale.

(In other words, only big shots are gathered here? Still, is this building made from stone? It feels like I've rarely seen things similar to this. A stone-made building. Stone-made? Certainly, it's more firm than the wooden-made ones. But on the other hand, it's much more bothersome to build.) Naga looked at the building closely and again felt strange, however, the building gave off an impression of it probably serving some purpose.

4

It was decided that an enquiry would be held with Naga as a representative, and therefore, he was brought by a guide further inside the building. The rest of his troupe stayed in a waiting room.

“Will Naga-san be fine by himself? If they discover his identity and arrest him…. will it be really okay?”

Ais whispered this question to Vita while looking slightly anxious.

(Isn’t it rare for Ais to be this worried about a stranger?)

Vita however, replied with a voice as if she couldn’t care less about them being overheard.

“You don’t have to worry. To begin with, there’s no reason for him to be exposed.”

“However, back when Naga-san stole Fort Ein, he exposed his face to the soldiers there. There’s no telling if those who have seen Naga-san before will recognize him by his face.”

Vita made a wry smile at Ais’ manner of speaking.

“You’re overreacting way too much, Ais. Did you forget he told us to change our skin color and hairstyle? Our way of talking is also supposed to be completely different, so I don’t think anyone will notice.”

“Then, I guess that’s fine, but….”

“It will be the same for us if Naga becomes exposed by any chance. In that case, we can only run wild, rescue Naga-san and escape the city. Obviously, there might be some casualties among us, nevertheless…”

Ais swallowed her saliva and nodded down with a stern expression.

“Well, shouldn’t we place our expectations in Naga’s acting skill? Rather, if it’s

the folks from Kasandora, they will certainly not detain some stranger upon asking him for information they need. To begin with, as long as they don't learn of Raibach's identity, they shouldn't learn about Naga as well."

Being called by his name, Raibach nodded down deeply.

"If it's Naga-sama, he will be fine. He will get through that enquiry without fail."

"I guess you're right."

Finally, a broad smile appeared on Ais' stiff face.

"Still, Ais, you act as though your lover was taken away by soldiers. Do you care that much for Naga's welfare?"

"Eh? Noooooo, what are you talking about, Vita-san?! I-I-I-It's not because of that, you know? Naga-san is our leader, so shouldn't it be an obvious thing to worry about him?"

Ais insisted this, however, both her conduct and expression looked as though she was panicking. Vita was fully aware of that.

(Hahaha, this girl is still wet behind her ears.)

“Houhou, are you sure?”

The moment Vita sent a lukewarm smile at her, Ais put her hands in front of her very red face and waved with them.

“Of course I am!”

“What’s your opinion of him, Lela?”

“Eh? Uhm…… that’s righ, t. For us, the family of Heindler, Naga-san is a very important be, ing.”

Lela replied that way while carefully choosing her words. As she did so, Kay, Nonoel, Cu, Ixine, Linne & Linna, and Harlequin nodded down at once, however, one could clearly see the anxiety drawn on their faces, as they cared for Naga.

Kukuku – Vita chuckled in a weeping manner upon seeing that.

(It looks like, these girls have been captivated by Naga. Well, maybe I too feel that way. Still, I’m not sure about the world where both humans and the witches can coexist. At least, he was able to shown these girls a dream. They have probably become happy while watching that dream. The same goes for me and my daughters, and for Harrigan, I guess. That’s why we decided to follow Naga, and most likely, Harrigan too, feels the same way about this. Indeed, he’s an interesting, yet strange man.)

4

The place to which Naga was guided to was a station, or rather, it would be more suitable to call it an interrogation room, as it actually had a simplistic build.

(Well, I guess that was to be expected. There's no way they would let a person of doubtful origins, like me, enter a guest room.) At one corner of the confined room, there were a desk and chair, in front of which, was placed a folding stool. A man with a sharp look and military suit, who was sitting in the chair, threw a glance at Naga walking in. On both the left and right side of the desk, there were guards standing at attention.

(They seem to be pretty capable.)

Naga felt that way as he ran his eyes over the guards.

(Well then, should I start to brace myself?)

The reason why Naga thought so wasn't because he wanted to be careful not to expose himself. To begin with, he didn't consider such a possibility.

Naga had to act skillfully in drawing out information from his opponent and finding out about the current situation in this city. Perhaps, one could say that the outcome of this interview will determine the future of the witches. That's why, this is what he meant by bracing himself.

After he followed the guide, Naga moved to the man's front and halted there. Not standing up, the man gave him the signal to sit. Naga bowed down in respect and sat down on the stool.

He could sense the man becoming slightly nervous.

(Is it because he's cautious of me? No, I don't think so. Wouldn't you feel this way, in the face of a much more imminent threat? As expected, were the rumors about a war approaching true? However, for the atmosphere to become like this, perhaps…. I should respond to it? I guess, it should be natural for me to act

nervous and excited. After all, I'm the leader of a troupe who has been pulled in front of this big shot.) As Naga was thinking so, the man ran his eyes over Naga again, as if trying to evaluate him.

"You've done a great job by coming from this far away. My name is Ligaya, and I'm the adjutant of general-dono, Guiscard, who's the king representative of this country."

(King representative……representative? Did something happen to this country?)

Naga thought suspiciously, but nevertheless, he bowed down while feigning ignorance.

"So you're the boss of the troupe, right?"

Ligaya's wording was polite, but he gave an impression of being rude in intent.

"Yes, my name is, Negane."

"Apparently, you stopped by at Fort Ein on your way, but….."

Ligaya went straight to the point without any preface.

"Yes. It happened while passing near that place. Before coming to city, we thought about doing entertainment for soldiers stationed there for few days, but…."

"Did you follow the Schweiz River and reach there from Lancel?"

"That's right."

"And you weren't hindered by the witches?"

"No, not really. There nobody besides us, therefore, I thought, must have been very lonely place. We crossed sea to arrive here, so we don't quite, know current situation."

Naga casted down his eyes and scratched his head. Obviously, it was an act, however, it probably didn't look like much of an excuse.

"Ah no, it's not like I'm trying to find any fault with you. Then, it was like that? Despite you walking along the river, you didn't engage with the witches directly?"

“Yes.”

“However, you saw the witches inside Fort Ein, right?”

“Yes, they were. I was startled a bit, but, they chase us off with not doing any bad, so I stroke down chest in relief.”

“I’ll repeat this again and ask you, one more time. Were you, able to grasp how many witches were there?”

“4, maybe 5 went to deal with us. But, since we no enter inside, we not able to see how many there, exactly. I, apologize.”

Surely, Ligaya had already been able to obtain this much information. Being neither irritated nor fed up, Ligaya carried on his interrogation unconcerned.

“Is that so? By the way, did you remember how they look?”

Naga expected this question to appear, so he pretended to remember.

“Umm…. there was bluish black hair, with a large build, was giving orders to everyone. I think, she was leader.”

“Is this, what the witch looked like?”

As soon as Ligaya gave the signal, one of the guards showed Naga a personal description. There he saw a drawn face of a heinously smiling witch, however, it certainly gave off Harrigan’s aura.

(That woman, if she sees this interpretation, she’ll surely murder the guy who drew this! This picture just screams for that to happen.) “Ah… certainly, that witch, that witch.”

“I see. As one would expect, it was the clique of Harrigan?”

Judging from Ligaya’s way of talking, it seemed that Harrigan was a famous witch, even among humans.

(Well, I guess that’s understandable. Until now, she’s been the one who’s borne the full brunt of humans’ attacks. And then, her party is the one that has been repelling the enemy’s attacks.) Naga could recall Harrigan’s fighting style that’s based on controlling a large wooden puppet, and scattering Kasandora Kingdom’s troops from the cliff.

(I guess, she can't avoid being seen when fighting in front.)

"Then, those witches that are occupying the fort, were they preparing for something?"

Ligaya's voice brought Naga back to his senses.

"No, it not feel like they preparing anything in particular. I saw wall strengthening construction, but, atmosphere quite leisurely. Even some witches, threw down tools and drank."

Fumu – Ligaya folded his arms and groaned in a low voice.

"So, it doesn't seem like….. the witches will threaten us anytime soon, does it? If that's true…."

Ligaya pondered for a moment, so Naga stayed calm and awaited his next words.

After a while of continued silence, Ligaya raised up his head and asked Naga:

"Did you notice something else that was unusual? Anything will do."

"Something, unusual….. That's right, all witches, fine girls. And wore awfully small, piece of cloths. I think maybe they want appeal to troupe…. ah, pardon me."

Ligaya, who had a stern face all the time, couldn't resist making a wry smile at Naga's words.

"Well, for someone of your status, I don't think it's impossible…. so it was like that?"

Ligaya pondered again as if hitting upon something.

(Hmph. So I was given a chance to explain and didn't get scolded? Since they're the ones trying to exterminate the witches, I thought they would be much more biased against the witches, but….) "It looks like, all the members in your troupe are girls. Were you the only one who dealt with the witches when stopping by the fort?"

"No, female dancers, I, together with them."

"I see. I guess, we need to consider the possibility that the witches…. didn't lay

their hands on your troupe, since they were all girls.”

(What? So this guy is able to reason that way? I wouldn’t have expected this from him, I think) “Then, what do you plan to do afterwards?”

Ligaya suddenly changed the topic of their conversation.

“If possible, we like to perform inside city. If not, there no meaning in coming. And if that the case, we be much in red.”

“You mean it? I feel pity for you, but, that would be a difficult request.”

“Is it, really difficult?”

Naga put on an act and dropped down his shoulders disappointedly.

“There’s a chance that, a war might break out soon, so we’re patrolling this city. Our soldiers and citizens are making strenuous efforts for the war, so it isn’t the right time for them to be watching performances. We need to remove any factors that can thwart our preparations. Even if you were to try to do so, there’s no way you would receive a permission for that.”

(As expected, they’re quite at their wits’ end.)

While thinking so, Naga hung his head and replied powerlessly.

“That right. Then, no other way than return to Lancel.”

“You’re going back the way you came from, right?”

“This is only option. We bit scared when, passed near the witches. However, nothing happened to us, so I think…. we be fine with retuning back.”

Ligaya gazed fixedly at Naga with a stern expression.

(What? Could it be that he saw through me?)

“I thought about giving you a reward if you plan to pass near that fort again, but well…”

“Eh? Yes? W, What you mean to say?”

Naga was half acting, however, he was honestly bewildered, as he couldn’t grasp Ligaya’s true intention.

“There’s been no local who managed to meet the witches, so your visit before

might be the first and the last one. Also, there's no doubt that the witches have already memorized your faces, right?"

"Is…. this true?"

"That's why I wanted to ask if you feel like paying them a visit, once more, but this time with one of our messengers."

"Wha…What?!"

As one would expect, Naga too became dumfounded at Ligaya's words.

"Even if we send a messenger, there's no guarantee the witches will hear us out. In the worst-case scenario, you might all be murdered without being given a chance to argue."

(I haven't given it any thought, but….. it's not impossible for them to do so. That's because, Harrigan has talked before about assassins sent by the church to aim for their lives. It could be that the witches had considered Kasandora's messengers as assassins….. therefore, resulting in these guys thinking this way. I guess, they reap what they sow.) Not revealing his thoughts, Naga waited for the next words from his opponent.

"Therefore, we'd like to entrust you with our messenger. And we shall reward you, provided you decide to go back there. Obviously, we can't cover the cost of your trip, but…."

"Still, we driven away, last time we drop by. We go there, but, I think it result in same."

"You don't particularly need to talk with them. We'll prepare a letter here for the witches, so you only have to pass it to them."

"Ah….. yes, if that case…. I think it be doable."

Naga bent his neck and worked his brain hard.

(What's he trying to make me do? Could it be….. he's testing me?)

"We return there either way. If just stopping by, we take care of request."

"You mean it? Then, I shall make the arrangements. Please return back to the waiting room."

“Understood.”

Naga bowed down multiple times and left the station.

As soon as he took his leave, Ligaya called out to one of his subordinates who was standing behind him.

“Now that it’s come to this, go and compose a letter to the witches immediately.”

“Still, are you really fine with this, Ligaya-sama? Having that group of vagabonds deliver our letter.”

“I don’t care. Will those performers be captured or killed by the witches? It’s no skin off my nose.”

“Nevertheless, I think we should also worry about them possibly fleeing.”

“Of course, even if they run away with the reward, it won’t be a big deal, since it’s not a big sum of money. On the other hand, if our plan goes favorably, there might be more gain to us….”

Ligaya slowly stood up from his chair.

“In the end, the matter regarding the witches is just something we are doing on the side. Rather than that, we should, right now, prioritize the direct threat coming from the extermination group against the witches that’s heading south. There’s no telling if those guys will take the opportunity to attack us, so we better hasten ourselves with the preparations.”

“Yes, understood. We shall prepare the letter immediately.”

Soon after Naga returned back, he retold the whole story to everyone, making them drop their jaws at this unexpected turn of events.

“Those guys, what are they thinking?!”

Vita asked as if spitting it out.

“It’s just assumption, but, possible. I guess, their way of proposing ceasefire.”

And then, she made an expression of wanting to doubt.

“For real?”

“I am, serious.”

“Ah no, that’s not what I mean. I wanted to ask if those folks from Kasandora are seriously considering a ceasefire.”

“Will depend on what they want convey.”

“However, if they really do, it would be ridiculous.”

Kukuku – Vita chuckled while saying so.

“So basically, we will be both delivering and receiving the letter, right?”

Naga put up his hands, so as to have Ixine pay more attention.

“Lower voice, Ixine, or someone overhear.” “Ah, sorry about that.”

Ixine hurriedly blocked her mouth using her hands.

“That’s true, I’ve similar thoughts to Ixine’s.”

Vita casted her staring eyes at Naga.

“In other words, Naga, you’ll be the one delivering that letter, right?” “I will. Once I do, we check content and discuss with Harrigan regarding what we do. This time, there be messenger tag along, but, he should no suspect anything, even if let him stay at fort.”

“Certainly, I’m curious about what they want to tell us, will it be good news?

With that, their discussion reached its conclusion.

And then, they waited a short while.

Being accompanied by his men, Ligaya turned up in the waiting room.

“This is the letter I’d like for you to bring to the witches.”

One of his subordinates handed over a letter, sealed with wax, to Naga.

“Remember, you only have to pass it to them.”

“Understood.”

Naga bowed down deeply while thinking about this.

(It looks like things have taken an unexpected turn. However, we can make use of it. No, we definitely have to seize this favorable opportunity.) 7

Naga and his troupe of performers were assisted by the guards on their way to one of Kasandora's forts that was nearby the witches.

Once they arrived, one of the soldiers spoke:

"We'll excuse ourselves here, as our presence might hinder your interaction with the witches."

The soldiers gave an impression as if being prepared to flee, however, Naga and the rest would rather avoid the soldiers meeting with the witches.

"This much do. Thank you, very much."

Naga bowed down.

And then, the troupe left the fort, went south and returned back to Fort Ein. Because there might be someone watching, just to make sure, they were received as guests. Naga called out to the witches, who turned out to be Narcissus and Selena, that were there.

Selena, who could check the surroundings using her Heaven Eye, sensed Naga and the rest approaching, so she brought Narcissus with her to welcome them. However, upon their immediate meeting, it seemed as though Naga was distant in his attitude. Like that, all the concerned visitors were escorted and brought inside the fort. 8

"What's the meaning of this?!"

Harrigan, Naga, and the rest faced each other inside a single room of the fort's residential building. The head of the Heindler clan opened her eyes widely in surprise as she was retold the whole story of Naga's interrogation.

"With that, we've been entrusted with this letter and arrived here to deliver it to you, who is the head of the witches. They hope you'd be interested to know its contents."

Lela returned the charm on Naga to its usual level, so all the witches could understand Naga's manner of speaking like they used to.

"Is that so? Then, shall we open it quickly?"

Harrigan received the letter from him and broke the seal in a casual manner. And then, she took out its contents and quickly ran her eyes over it.

“Fumu, it’s just as Naga predicted. They are asking us indirectly if we want to stop fighting each other. What’s more, their style of writing is condescending.”

“So it was just like I thought, eh?”

“However, despite their haughty way of expression, it seems like the Kasandora Kingdom is at its wits end if they’re making this request to us.”

Saying so, Harrigan made an expression filled with mixed feelings.

‘You’re right.’ – Naga nodded down.

“Losing to us this badly, and eventually, their fort. On top of that, they’re being threatened by a large army of 3000-4000 enemy units. Misfortunes never come singly, or so they say. I guess, it’s not impossible for them to want to grasp at straws.” “So we’re the straws?”

Harrigan made a displeased face, however, Vita laughed enjoyably.

“Hahaha, rather than straws, I’d say we’re more like poisoned steam buns.”

“Is this something to laugh about?!”

“Ohhh, Vita, that’s some nice comparison.”

“Naga, you too! Is this the right time to be praising others?!”

“Don’t be so grumpy, Harrigan.”

“Still, Naga, they might be putting their hands up and offering us a ceasefire due to them being in a crisis right now, but, don’t forget they’ve been causing us lots of pain, so they can’t be fully trusted. Maybe, it’s better to let them get attacked and crushed?”

“I’ll agree with you on the part that they can’t be trusted, but, with how things look right now, we’ve got to make use of this situation.”

“Make use? What do you mean?”

“Isn’t this a favorable opportunity to demand gratitude from them?”

“Gratitude? You mean accepting their request? What good will come from doing that? Wouldn’t it be more beneficial for us to let the Kasandora Kingdom perish in a fight with other countries?”

“That would probably work short-term, however, there are more gains for us in the long-term if they survive.”

At Naga’s words, Harrigan frowned and made a doubtful face.

“Is that…. true?” “The information regarding the approaching troops is partial, so I can’t tell for sure, but according to what that adjutant Ligaya said, the troops are led by the Church. If the Kasandora Kingdom suffers a complete defeat, we’ll be next in line to receive the Church’s onslaught. Rather, they will become even more motivated to charge at us after gaining victory over the Kasandora Kingdom. And at that rate….”

Naga shrugged his shoulders a bit.

“We’ll be forced to throw away the fort we captured and retreat back to the forest. However, whether we can protect it or not remains as a question.”

“But…. just because we comply with the ceasefire, it doesn’t mean the Kasandora Kingdom will turn into our ally. Also, there’s no telling if those folks will really fight against the extermination group.”

“That will depend on how we play it, you see.”

“W….What do you mean?”

“We will create a situation where both sides won’t be on good terms with each other, even if they don’t fight. This will become our advantage.”

“W….What?”

“What do you mean, Naga?”

Both Harrigan and Vita, as well as the other witches, turned their puzzled looks at Naga.

“In other words, if we make Kasandora Kingdom and the extermination group glare at each other, we can thwart the church’s plan, right? They won’t be able to charge at us with their full army while having Kasandora Kingdom at their backs. Naturally, this will slow down their military movements. Our aim is to buy us some time, proceed with our preparations, and try to counter the extermination group with all that we’ve got.”

‘I see.’ – Harrigan nodded down.

“Still, is there any guarantee that the Kasandora Kingdom and the extermination group won’t join their forces together?”

“True, there isn’t. Far from that, it’s possible that the Kasandora Kingdom will do so due to them suffering a crisis.”

“In that case, shouldn’t we consider our plan with that in mind?”

“That’s why, I’m telling you we won’t be relying upon others but ourselves to create our desired situation. And then, prolong it.”

“No…. I don’t get your idea.”

Harrigan, whose face looked pitiful, turned her sight toward Vita. However, the latter merely lightly shook her head.

“I too, can’t comprehend that. Do you mind, explaining it in a more simple and concrete way, Naga?”

“That’s to say, this, you see.”

Naga explained his strategy to the best of his efforts.

“….With that, we’ll put on the Kasandora Kingdom Army’s uniforms and give the extermination army some hard times. If we do so, it’s inevitable for both sides’ relationship to turn worse, right? Not to mention, the extermination group will put the blame on Kasandora for something the latter hasn’t done, so they will no longer be able to come to an agreement.”

All the witches shook their heads up and down with dumbfounded faces.

“You’re truly an evil person.”

Vita stated so with an astonished expression, following that, Harrigan too, nodded in agreement.

“Good grief. And to think we witches are regarded as heinous by humans. Don’t we look the same as babies in front of Naga?”

“Naga-san, you’re quite vicious, aren’t you?”

This time it was Kay’s turn to carry on.

“No no, I’m surely not vicious, right?”

“That’s right. I think you’re exaggerating, Kay-chan.”

“Ais, you do understand, right?”

“Rather, there’s no end to him being treacherous.” “Doesn’t it make me look even worse?”

“Just how did you come up with such a heinous idea?”

“As expected, isn’t it because of his character?”

“Vita, Harrigan, don’t say those cruel things.”

“They aren’t. We think they reflect the truth.”

“Ah no, this much of an idea is normal for me.”

Harrigan pulled her head back and glared at Naga with scornful eyes.

“Really?”

“I wonder about that.”

“That’s probably like him.”

“Well, regarding how vicious he is, let’s leave that matter aside.”

“Don’t just leave it aside!”

“Then, will this really work? This is the real question. And how are you confident of its success?”

“…..You usually tend to find a solution when seeking a way out of a desperate situation, Vita.”

“As if!”

“It’s not necessary false, but well, I guess it will only show during a contest. Till now it’s been always like this for me, I think. Back then, when we fought against 2000 soldiers, did you think you’d win?”

Harrigan responded to Naga’s remark.

“Umu, that’s right. We thought it was useless for us to fight back, without even trying. I guess it’s a bad habit of ours.”

“That’s right, Harrigan. You should always try to do your best. And if it fails, try

something else. And if, again, it doesn't work…."

"If it doesn't work?"

"Then run away. Run away and start again from the beginning."

Kukakaka – Naga laughed while saying so.

(So there was such a way of thinking? Good grief. Whenever it comes to this guy,) "I think humans…. no, even us the witches can't comprehend your way of reasoning. But, for a fool to be able to break through these obstacles, perhaps, you're no longer different from a genius."

Saying that, Harrigan leaked out a scornful laughter which she couldn't hold back.

"If I were to say, rather than Naga-sama being a genius, he's more of a natural disaster. Especially, for his opponents."

As soon as Raibach stated this, the present witches smiled and broke into laughter.

A fearsome being that could be regarded as a natural disaster for its opponents, but reversely, a trustworthy being for its allies. In fact, wasn't it because Naga had won easily against the advancing army of Kasandora Kingdom just like stopping a violently blowing storm? Recalling that event, the witches told themselves they could place more hope in their future.

"Then, let's make the best of our time and proceed with our preparations while the Kasandora Kingdom and the extermination group haven't struck a deal, Vita."

"Umu…. that's right…"

"What? Is there still something on your mind?"

"Well, I agree with what you've just said. Still, there's one more concern."

Naga squinted his eyes and urged Vita to speak.

"One more concern? What could it be?"

"If memory serves me right, among the information which you acquired in Kasandora Kingdom, there was one regarding troops that falls under the direct

control of the church. That is to say, information that's supported by the rumor we had heard in Lancel. Apparently, those guys are strong, you know?"

Naga lean forward his body while making a serious expression.

"Are they that strong?"

"Umu. I too have only heard about them from rumors, so I can't say for sure, but, apparently, they're combat troops that are referred as brigades. Their soldiers wear silver armor, which is highly resistant to magic and dulls it."

"To what extent?"

"We won't know that unless we try. It would be different if it's just 1 or 2 soldiers, but, we've never fought a troop consisting of all soldiers wearing silver armor."

"For real….? Then, does it mean that everything will depend on the outcome of this battle?"

Naga made a difficult face while groaning in a low voice.

"And that's not all."

Naga raised up his head at Vita's words.

"We still don't know how many of those brigades there are. I've only heard about this, but I think there are supposed to be 7-8. That's why, I'm worried about the number of brigades coming here this time."

"So, based on Vita's statements, should I understand that….. those brigades each possess a different fighting strength?"

(As usual, this guy is sharp.)

"That's right."

"What part of them is bothering you?"

"There are 3 rumors that describe their exceptional strength, especially the one in which apparently there's that annoying troop referring to themselves as 'the Brigade of 88'"

'This too, is a rumor I learned from hearsay, but…' – Vita revealed the meaning behind the brigade's name followed by a story of the brigade holing up.

“Hohou. Indeed, they’ve got some terrific fighting style there.”

Naga ooh’ed in admiration.

“That’s why, I think we should avoid any hard fights involving the Brigade of 88 if they come.”

“I guess, we need to check more on that Brigade of 88.”

“How do you plan, to do that?”

“By kidnapping 1 or 2 soldiers and questioning them?”

“That measure is way too extreme!”

“Having you say it’s extreme, kinda makes me feel uneasy.”

“What’s the meaning of that?!”

“Ah no, nothing in particular. Don’t mind it.”

“Shouldn’t it be fine, to have Linne and Linna overhear some soldiers?”

Harrigan suggested.

“…….True. I guess it’s more convenient that way, isn’t it? There’s the possibility that the Kasandora Kingdom might become wary if their soldiers are kidnapped. They might even consider it as a surprise attack, so it’s better not to have them be alert. That being said, in addition to Linne & Linna sneaking inside the city, we need to determine the position of the extermination group. I think I can only entrust Yuuki and Selena with that task.”

“It can’t be helped. Well, shall we get moving then?”

—Why is Yuuki always acting this high-handedly?—

Kay whispered this question to Nonoel.

—Isn’t it because her head’s always in the clouds when she’s flying?— —Nonoel, that was good!—

“Hey there! what are you whispering to each other?!”

Yuuki raised her eyebrows and stared at them both.

“Nothing~~” “Nothing in particular”

‘Hmph’ – Yuuki snorted and turned back her face.

“Anyway, I’ll set off tomorrow and fly near the royal capital to conduct a regular scouting.”

“Then, will you take this mantle with you and place it near the city, so that I can teleport with Selena?”

Elysione made such a suggestion.

“There are also guards inside the city, so they might notice something strange. Maybe, if you add some more mantles…”

“That’s right. It should be much more convenient if we increase the number of spots where Elysione can teleport to. And If we mark the targets, it will be also easier to transport Selena. I’ll be relying on you, Elysione.”

Biku – Once Naga lightly bowed down, Elysione drew back with a start.

“Ah…. yes, I, I’ll take care of that.”

(For some reason….my heart, skips a beat whenever this person bows down.)

Unaware of Elysione’s bewilderment, Harrigan faced toward Naga with a stern expression. 9 “By the way, how do we reply to the letter? It was written they would like to receive an answer from us, but…”

Naga quickly responded, following Harrigan’s question.

“It should be fine if we just say we don’t plan to interfere with them.”

“Will they believe in such an ambiguous reply?”

“For now, it’s better that way. Still, that’s right, should we also add they better do the same?”

‘Fumu’ – Harrigan folded her arms and groaned.

“So it’s come to this? Indeed, it’s hard to strike a bargain.”

(I don’t think so. After all, you have done so way too many times.)

“It should do if we hand our reply to the troop nearby, watching us. We’ll just compose a proper reply and have them deliver it to their superiors.”

“Have you considered…. they might try and arrest us when trying to hand the

reply?’

At Ais’ question, Naga denied with full confidence.

“I don’t think one or two soldiers from a scouting troop will attempt to catch you. If they could, they’d have long since won this war.”

“You’re right. If there are just 10 or 20 soldiers, then we can somehow manage. Speaking of which, Lela, I’m sorry, but, could you please take care of writing the reply? Once you’re done, go together with Kay and Cu to where the troop is stationed and pass it to them. Selena will observe their position, so you’ll know where the scouts are hiding.”

“Understood, Ane-sa, ma.”

“Apart from that, Harrigan, there’s one more thing I’d like to ask. Can someone from your group go to Lancel?”

“Lancel, again? For what purpose?”

“I happened to see slaves there on sale back when we were visiting Lancel.”

Harrigan made a doubting face after hearing Naga’s words.

And it wasn’t just her either. The other witches, as well as Raibach, had doubting, or rather – curious expressions, while being unable to understand what Naga was trying to imply.

“Certainly, slaves are bound to be there as well. After all, that port city is a place which thrives in trade. What’s more, there’s no limit to the amount of food and articles sold.”

“Oh and by the way, we managed to sell your gadgets and jewelry for high prices.”

“I guess, that’s very like of you…. Speaking of which, I received a brief report from Ais and Lela the other day, when you had passed through here on your way to the capital of the Kasandora Kingdom, but…….”

The complexion on Harrigan’s face, which seemed to express her doubt, turned more and more thick in color. Rather than doubt, perhaps it was better to say, of misgiving.

“Sorry, but, can we sell more gadgets and jewelry from your warehouse?”

“Haaa? What, are you talking about? What do you intend to do?!”

“If possible, I’d like to have you, Vita, help us too.”

Being told so, Vita couldn’t hide her puzzlement.

“That’s why, I’m asking what do you intend to do with the money…. hmm? Don’t tell me, you plan to purchase those slaves?”

“Ohh, how sharp of you, Vita.”

“What? You!”

“W, What are you angry about?”

“Despite us being in a life-and-death matter, you’re telling us to sell our items to buy young female slaves… no, just what are you making us do?”

Ais stood up while swaying.

“Naga-san, so it’s all about that? Is this what you’ve been thinking about?”

‘Oh, that’s right!’ – Kay looked up in the air as if recalling something.

“Back then, Naga-san would frequently ask about slaves.” “I misjudged you, Naga.”

Harrigan’s hair drifted in the air.

“Wait wait wait! You lot are misunderstanding something!”

“How are we supposed to misunderstand you?”

“I told you I want to buy slaves, however, I didn’t say they will be females. They’re male slaves! On top of that, robust ones!”

“Naga-san, could it be, that you swing in that direction?”

“You’re running your imagination too far away, Ais!”

“….Am I wrong?”

“Ah, for god’s sake, these girls are. Why won’t you first listen to what people have to say?”

Naga held his head.

“Isn’t it because there’s a problem in your behavior?”

“Right? Suddenly falling into a bathroom and rubbing Ane-sama’s chest. You could only think of Naga-san buying females when he mentions slaves with that in mind. Don’t you think your conduct is what forces us to think that way?”

“Ah, no, Ais, why are you….”

Harrigan, whose face was red, chided Ais.

“Ehhh? Naga-sama, have you really done such an envious…?”

Raibach looked at Harrigan with an envious face.

“D, Don’t look at me with such eyes!”

“So, Hari-nee had her chest already rubbed by Naga-san?! I’m enviousDarkdhaos (talk) 13:19, 29 October 2016 (CEST) Right, Nono?”

“Noooo? I, I’m not particularly, not at all, envious about that!”

“That’s why, don’t tell people things that are easy to misunderstand!”

Harrigan gazed at Ais with fearsome, murderous eyes.

“Eh? But, isn’t it true? Isn’t this what Yuuki, who witness the event, clearly said?”

Yuuki, whose name was suddenly called out, turned away and averted her eyes. On the other hand, the other witches who were unaware of that fact besides Ais and Lela drew back their heads and looked at Harrigan with scornful eyes.

“I’m telling you it’s wrong!”

“Harrigan.”

“W….What, Naga?”

“Do you now understand a bit this pain of being misunderstood and ignored by others?” “I do…. However, being pointed that out by someone, who tries to fulfill his lust by buying slaves, makes me incredibly annoyed.”

“Just how untrustworthy can I be?”

Naga sighed while having a miserable expression.

“Just as I said, I’m going to buy male slaves.”

“What do you plan to do with them later? Make them help with strengthening this fort? Certainly, someone else’s hands would be welcomed for construction jobs, but, it’s meaningless for now, isn’t it? Weren’t you also the one who said that?

“Obviously, I won’t be using them for that purpose. I’m going to make them into soldiers.”

“What?!”

Vita bent her face in amazement, whereas all the other witches and Raibach opened their eyes widely.

“No matter how many of you are mighty warriors, the number of witches is way too scarce. After all, your enemy is an army of 3000-4000 units. What’s more, if the war continues to escalate, we’ll need hands for carrying food, weapons, and armor. Not to mention, you may also have to cross swords or strike each other if a battle becomes intense. I’m not saying you lot possess no hand-to-hand combat skills. It’s just you’re more suited for long range fighting. Now that it’s been mentioned, we’ll also need people who can shoot with bows and those who can march into an enemy’s camp with swords and spears. We’ve gotta supply ourselves with those soldiers.”

Despite Naga finishing his explanation, everyone was left open-mouthed while being unable to utter a single word.

“What are you amazed at? A battle is primarily more about quantity than quality, so raising the number of soldiers is the basic of basics.”

Harrigan and Vita exchanged looks.

“Are you of the same mind, Vita?”

“I’ve never participated in a big war before, so don’t ask me.”

Harrigan pulled herself together and faced toward Naga.

“Still, even if we buy those slaves, will they do as they’re told? Will they fight for our sake? Or will they go against us?”

“Slaves probably consider their buyer as their owner. It doesn’t matter to them

who that person is, or from where it is.”

“That may be true….. but…”

“In that case, you shall be their owners. Or could it be that only humans can trade slaves?”

“Ah no, I don’t… think so.”

“Then, there shouldn’t be any problems.”

“Even if you throw out your chest like that…”

“Slaves usually tend to live in harsh surroundings. They might thank us If we provide them with proper meals and warm beds. And if we promise to set them free after they perform well in battle, they might become even more excited to work for us. Be it humans or the witches, for slaves, it should make no big difference. It’s how they’re going to be treated that matters the most.”

“You’re talking about slaves as though you can understand them, aren’t you?”

Despite Vita saying this in a teasing manner, Naga puffed up with pride and answered while remaining calm.

“I don’t. More like, I can picture them. Since we can’t raise soldiers using straightforward methods, using slaves as soldiers is the easiest and fastest way. Don’t you think?” “If I were to say…. Yes, you might be right.”

“Now then, Harrigan, I’d like for you to carry your items to Lancel, convert them into money, and then use it to purchase the slaves. Vita, you too, I’ll appreciate it if you could help us.”

“I don’t mind, but….. just how much time would it take to transport our load from a village to the city?”

“Is that so? Since Elysione won’t be coming with us….”

“No, even if that girl did, she wouldn’t be useful at all. After all, she can’t carry things using her mantles, not to mention, the clothes we put on.”

“Yeah. Certainly, it’ll take way too much time to load the cart and transport the items.”

“Then, how about we use Yuuki?”

Yuuki had been deliberately turning away all this time, but, she couldn't help it when everyone's gazes were focused on her, so she turned back around "Fine with me, but, I'll have to go and return many times, since my board can't carry that much, you know?"

"We don't mind. However, I still think it will be much faster than carrying it on the cart. Also, as I fear, we'll need to have someone who can evaluate the items, so…"

'Well, certainly, that's true' – Yuuki puffed her cheeks in displeasure, but nevertheless, she answered reluctantly.

"I've no discerning eye when it comes to an item's value."

"I'll have to return back to the forest to get my items. Then, how many slaves should we gather?"

"I don't know how much a single slave is worth, and also, how much can we gain from selling your items, so probably, it will depend on the outcome. We'll gather as many slaves as possible based on their costs. I'd like to have at least 100 of them, but, I'm not sure if there are slaves capable of fighting at a reasonable price on sale. In the worst case-scenario, I won't mind even if we manage to get just 10-20."

"You mean it? I guess, we'll just have to play it by ear."

"Right. Then, we need someone who can take care of them….."

Naga looked around at the present people and stopped his sights on a single one.

"I entrusted you with the sale of the items the previous time, but, as expected, the only one who can choose and buy slaves is you, Raibach."

Raibach whose face looked stupefied pointed at himself.

"Eh? Me?"

"Yes. If it's you, who has led soldiers before, then you will somehow be able to manage the slaves, won't you?"

"That's, well, yes."

“On the other hand, the same can’t be said about the witches. Don’t you agree, Harrigan?”

Harrigan shrugged her shoulders.

“Right. We’ve never swung swords or spears, so we haven’t the slightest idea about what kind of a person is suitable to become a soldier.”

“And with that, Raibach, you’ll be in charge of supplying us with slaves.” “Understood. I’ll try to do my best.”

Later, a talk regarding each person’s duty would be decided, with Naga being the main character. 10

Early the next morning.

Having confirmed the reply addressed to Kasandora, Lela took Cu, Kay, Nonoel, and Selena with her and left the Fort Ein.

The remaining witches worked in a hurry, so as to bring the items from their village hidden inside the forest, and prepare to repel the extermination group.

Lela and her team quickly returned back after they passed the reply to a scouting troop’s leader they had discovered.

Soon after Naga received the report from Lela, he started to do calculations inside his mind.

(Well then, I wonder, how much time did we manage to gain? Even if the extermination army reaches Kasandora Kingdom, they won’t be able to simply move, so perhaps we have around 10 days. If that’s not enough, should we put on the Kasandora army’s uniforms and attack the extermination army’s troops? I guess, I’d rather utilize that additional time and fully prepare before meeting them.)

Chapter 5-The Brigade’s True Strength

1

Unable to endure the time it was taking all of the troops to prepare, Jeweljude’s face turned impatient upon knowing that the Kasandora Kingdom was up to something.

(We can no longer afford to delay our departure. If we don’t advance toward the Kasandora Kingdom immediately…. Now is not the time to fuss over those fools who can’t even make proper preparations.) Making up his mind, Jeweljude brought with him only those troops that were ready to depart and advanced his brigade.

And so, the first wave of the witch extermination army, which centered around the Brigade of 88, left Granvista and aimed towards the place closest to the royal capital of the Kasandora Kingdom.

Jeweljude decided they would first stop near Kasandora, and then think of what to do next.

Together with the brigade, the first wave comprised of: 500 units sent by the city of Recissus, 200 from the city of Saintes Zephyr, and 400 from the city of Mergas, making it a total of 1100 units.

Since the Kasandora Kingdom’s capital was a small-scaled one, their mobilization power was small as well. Despite that, one couldn’t underestimate their opponents.

The second wave numbered 1200 soldiers; nevertheless, it was falling behind in their advancement.

The remaining 700 were reasonably equipped but had low fighting spirit, therefore, they were moved to the transport troop. Not to mention, they were probably still in Granvista.

The sun shone through the clouds and radiated a red light from its western position, which indicated it was already close to evening. It was then that Jeweljude decided to set up a simple camp and stay overnight there.

Inside a large tent that had the crest of the brigade, Jeweljude, his staff officers, and generals from various countries had gathered.

Due to Jeweljude's giant body, his head would hit the tent's beam, so he was forced to bend his back when moving inside.

Including Jeweljude, everyone was wearing armor.

Waiting for them to sit down on the line of folding stools, Jeweljude took his seat of honor and called out toward his comrades in a voice that could be felt in one's stomach.

"Then, let's begin our meeting. First, I think we should consider the latter part of our plan, but…"

At that point, Jeweljude cut off his words and looked around at the faces of the other generals.

"In order to retrieve back Fort Ein, we, the Brigade of 88 shall progress first."

A commotion rose among the generals.

"Therefore, I'd like to have your people stay here and suppress the Kasandora Kingdom."

"Jeweljude-dono, are you fine with that?"

General Ryuumu who led an army dispatched from Recissus Kingdom made this remark.

"What's the matter, Ryuumu-dono?"

"Are you saying you plan to charge at the witches with just your men?"

"That's right. After all, we need to get rid of them as soon as possible."

(Will they be okay?)

Facing toward the leader of the Brigade of 88, Ryuumu wondered about that. Nevertheless, not wanting to insult Jeweljude, he decided to ask it in a different way.

“However, now that they’ve shown suspicious movements, don’t you think it’s a bit dangerous to leave the Kasandora Kingdom as is?”

Nevertheless, Jeweljude wouldn’t take notice of his colleague’s remark.

“This is why I’m leaving you in charge of them. Also, I cannot possibly think of any reason why the Kasandora Kingdom would attack you. The only concern they might have is whether or not we will get violent within their territory. What’s more, if you assign your soldiers to us, you won’t be able to watch over their territory. Hence, I’d like for you to stay here and observe if there’s any malicious intent coming from the Kasandora Kingdom.”

Saying so, Jeweljude made a large-hearted smile.

“This way, your men can also be at ease and focus on distributing provisions, right?”

(Certainly, it’s just as Jeweljude-dono says, but, not being at war with the witches, won’t it result in us gaining a bad reputation?) Such was Ryuumu’s concern, which was characteristic of him.

“Fine. Still, will our important provisions be alright? I’m not convinced that the Kasandora Kingdom will be willing to share their food with us.”

“Well, you probably don’t need to worry about that.”

Ryuumu had some misgivings regarding that, however, Jeweljude could do nothing but assert.

“Nevertheless, we only have enough food for two to three days. In case those folks hesitate to help us, we will be either forced to use force or withdraw.”

This was another form of asking if it was fine to plunder the city by Ryuumu. However, at the same time, Jeweljude denied that in a half-threatening tone.

(If you want to withdraw now, then do it yourself. To begin with, it’s not like we’d asked you to come.) Jeweljude thought so while being irritated, however, he wouldn’t convert that into words, as he couldn’t be ignorant of the ways of

this world.

“Provided you’re right about the Kasandora Kingdom not cooperating, you can tell them you might resort to using force, which might work. However, remember that first come negotiations…. and then, actions.”

The leader of the remarkable brigade couldn’t endorse things like pillaging, so he stated his thoughts more or less this way.

For Ryuumu, ‘resorting to strength’ was a last resort, therefore, it was natural for him not to argue any further than this.

Ryuumu exchanged glances with generals from Saintes Zephyr and Mergas, after which, they all nodded to each other.

“Understood. We shall stay here and await your further instructions, while at the same time, prepare ourselves for the upcoming battles.”

(Upcoming battles? This guy is saying some cheeky things.)

Jeweljude laughed at the general inwardly, but obviously, he wouldn’t show that through his expression.

The ‘upcoming battles’ mentioned by Ryuumu were the ones concerning the invasion of the Black Forest. Their plan was to march toward the Black Forest after they have managed to retrieve Fort Ein. By then, it would be necessary to supply themselves with plenty of food to maintain their strategy for four to ten days.

All the generals took part in this campaign with the intention of invading the Black Forest. Otherwise, they wouldn’t have agreed to share in the profits, as it was meaningless to go on such a distant expedition.

Receiving provisions from the Kasandora Kingdom, avoiding any direct contact with the witches, finishing them off once they have been kicked out from Fort Ein by the brigade, and advancing towards the Black Forest, such was the plan of these generals.

The reason why they decided to join together was because of the Black Forest being said to be blessed with fruits of the land, and because of the witches’ hidden treasures.

None of them would complain, as they could claim the best spoils without having to sweat from their brows.

(Still, that applies only if the Brigade of 88 manages their job…. however, as one would expect, there's probably no way they would lose against the witches. Despite saying so, we shouldn't underestimate the witches. After all, haven't they gained victory over those 2000 soldier from the Kasandora Kingdom? If possible, I'd like for the brigade to sacrifice itself a bit, so as to make our job easier afterwards.) At the moment, Ryuumu and the rest could do nothing but follow Jeweljude's lead, however, by having the witches deplete the brigade's strength, they could hope to raise their influence when invading the Black Forest, and even become the core of the strategy. One could say they counted their chickens before they were hatched.

(If that happens, we can receive as many rewards as we want. And if we capture the witches, we can bring them back with us and present them to His Majesty the King without giving them to the Church.) By doing so, Ryuumu's dream of marrying a royalty's daughter and becoming part of it would finally come true.

(Therefore, I need to work them hard, or else…. also, I need the witches to do the same.) Various circumstances jumbled together, despite the army's purpose.

3

Soon after, Jeweljude deployed each respective country's troops near the kingdom's border, and sent a messenger to the second wave, then he proceeded to negotiations between both sides.

The king's representative, Guiscard, tried to be evasive in joining the negotiations, which would take place at Jeweljude's side's main camp, however, "If you don't cooperate with us, the army shall supply themselves with food using its own strength, which would be here on your territory."

In the end, even Guiscard had to yield and accept their conditions while having a bitter face.

Naturally, Guiscard's side was told to do its utmost, but, there seemed to be no need for him to worry for the time being.

Once it had been decided that Guiscard and the rest would carry provisions to the encampment of Recissus' army, Guiscard himself quickly withdrew back to the capital, explaining he needed time to make the preparations.

With one problem being resolved, Jeweljude hastened his brigade to set off towards Fort Ein.

3.5(?)

Some soldiers of Kasandora Kingdom overheard the negotiations and relayed the contents to others, which became the topic of their conversations.

For Linne and Linna, who infiltrated the city in order to gather intel, this was news they couldn't pass up.

The two of them quickly returned back to the fort and reported the newly acquired information to Naga and Harrigan.

Naga understood that the agreement between the kingdom and the extermination group was, in half, inspired by the latter's threat.

Dressing themselves in army clothing, Naga and the rest prepared to launch their plan of hindering the enemy, however, little did he know that the brigade had immediately departed in their direction.

4

“Excellent, we’re setting off!”

Jeweljude, whose body was covered in silver armor, roared on top of his horse.

In addition to his abnormally giant body, being completely armored made him easily as heavy as three adults. Therefore, the black-maned horse that he rode had a large trunk as well.

As if answering to Jeweljude’s impactful voice, the horse neighed and swayed with its torso.

“First, we will kick out those evil witches from Fort Ein! Father who art in heaven shall guide us through our path, so do not fear nor falter!”

“Ohhhh!”

The brigade’s cavalry pushed up their lances, the tips of which glittered upon receiving the sun’s light.

“Depart!”

Zun Zun – As soon as Jeweljude’s horse advanced one, two step forwards, a shock like sound trembled the earth.

The brigade, which belonged to the Church, was comprised of cavalry alone. One could say the structure of this group was biased, however, since the sole purpose of this expedition was to eliminate the enemy, only the cavalry, which excelled the most in speed and power, were up to this task.

They were needed for neither capturing, infiltration, nor maintaining a peace inside an enemy’s territory. Instead, it was their combat efficiency that mattered.

Not to mention, the members of the brigade were remarkable warriors who had honed both their command and control to a terrific level. They would

neither waste their time on chit-chats nor disarrange their ranks.

The brigade, which consisted of 500 units, was divided into five troops.

The first troop was led by Thule, the second – by Thales, the third – by Hittite, whereas the fourth one – by Reg.

All of these commanding officers had served long in their military service.

Despite there being scouts and transport troops tagging alongside the brigade, usually there are none under normal circumstances.

That's because brigades tend to travel from one place to another, solely depending on their own strength. Every time, they would change shifts among themselves when transporting their provisions.

When reaching a city, they would be offered support from their church, however, there would also be instances when their trips would take, at minimum, a few days, so they couldn't afford to travel empty-handed.

And then, there was the vice-commanding officer waiting on standby next to Jeweljude. The 5th troop fell under Jeweljude's direct control.

Right now, the 500-strong cavalry of the Brigade of 88 commenced their solemn march towards Fort Ein, with Jeweljude's troop leading the way.

5

Early morning, Yuuki, who was scouting the vicinity of the Kasandora Kingdom, returned back to Fort Ein and rushed in when Naga, Harrigan, and Vita were having breakfast.

Once he heard her report, Naga dropped his wooden plate.

“What?! The Brigade of 88 has started to move?”

“Uhm, yes, there’s no doubt about that. The crest that I saw belonged to the Church. It looks like they quickly started to advance.”

Yuuki had probably dashed here at full speed, as one could hear her breaths reverberating as she responded.

“How about the other troops?”

“There were no major movements, I think.”

Naga picked up the smoked meat, which he dropped on the ground, tossed it in his mouth, and munched.

Vita and Harrigan pulled back while staring at him with eyes full of disgust.

“That’s dirty.”

“Eating something that you have just dropped…..”

Not being mindful about their criticism, Naga looked up into the air and groaned.

“Is that so? Then, does it mean they are heading this way? I expected they would strike at us using their full force, but…. this is fast, way too fast.”

“Then, what do you plan to do, Naga?”

As soon as Naga spotted tension in Vita, Harrigan, and Ais’ expressions, he looked around at the rest of the witches with a determined-looking face.

“There’s no time to waste. We need to prepare for the battle immediately!”

“O, Oh?”

“We’re going to repel the Brigade of 88, just like we did with Kasandora Kingdom’s troops the other day. We’ll wear the military clothing and charge at them. However, this time, we’ll do it together(?).”

“But Naga, Raibach still hasn’t returned back. Don’t we need slave soldiers to lay an attack?”

Once Vita said so, Harrigan nodded in agreement.

“Also, Nonoel and Kay are absent, as they’ve tagged alongside Raibach.”

“I know that the level of difficulty has increased, but… it can’t be helped. Right now, we can only use the people we have. What’s more, if you cast your spells during a night attack, the enemy will be taken aback, as they probably won’t know what kind of witches they’re dealing with.”

(It’s way too difficult for us to attack without resorting to our magic, so I guess…. this is the only way.) ‘You’ve got a point.’ – Vita nodded as she resolved herself.

“We’ll divide into groups. Harrigan, Vita, quickly gather all your members.”

“Ais!”

“Yes.”

“Elysio!”

“At your service.”

Ais and Elysio stood up as if bouncing off and hurriedly left the room.

Taking a single plate from the floor, Naga stood up and tossed a piece of bread inside his mouth.

(Damn, that was faster than I’d expected. The commander of the brigade is surely a decisive guy. I can guess…. a hard fight will be awaiting us.) Once he swallowed the munched bread, Naga looked around the room, after which he noticed Vita and Harrigan looking at him with astonished expressions.

“He’s surely bad-mannered, that dragon-king.”

“Speaking of which, don’t just swallow that food like it’s nothing.”

“They say you can’t fight with an empty stomach.”

“Do they….?”

“They do, probably.”

“Again, you’re saying some convenient things.”

“More importantly, we’re going on a sortie. Harrigan, I’ll have you control wooden dolls once again.”

“I think I’ve already got used to it, so there’s no need for me to be that attentive when preparing. Give me a little while and I’ll do it.”

Making a deep nod, Naga faced toward Vita.

“Vita, I’ll need you to restrain the enemy again using your magic. Take Elysione with you.”

“That’s what I always do. Also, there’s no need for me to prepare.”

“As usual, I can rely on you girls. Well then.”

Naga who surveyed the room again folded his arms.

“It would be nice if I could perform something like atsumori(1) here, but…”

Naga muttered.

“A hot serving?”

“An abundant serving?”

Harrigan and Vita bent their necks in doubt, after which they retorted.

259

“”How much of a glutton are you!””

“That’s wrong, I wasn’t talking about food!”

“Then what?”

“Ah no… I myself wonder about that.”

Kaku – both the witches lost their balance.

“Just what on earth?! Is this something, you say, when departing to the front?”

“Right? If you ask me, I can no longer comprehend him.”

Harrigan too, frowned her eyebrows and retorted one more time.

‘More importantly,’ – Naga returned back to the topic by starting with these words.

“Now, we need to come up with a counterplan against the Brigade of 88.”

“Y, Yes.”

Harrigan and Vita’s expressions turned serious.

“Do you think it’s possible for us to repel them, Naga?”

“Not only are they elites, they also have as many as 500 people. I doubt our tactic will work twice.”

“Still, there’s one more concern.”

“Is it about their armor?”

“That’s right. Just like I’ve told you before, all members of the brigade wears silver armor. Therefore, we don’t know how effective will our magic be against them.”

“Good grief, you’re not going to tell me that your magic won’t work, right?”

“As expected, that would be way too exaggerated. Even if our magic won’t crush them down, there should be at least no problem in restraining their movements.”

“Then, let’s follow our plan.”

At that time, the noisy sounds of footsteps could be heard.

“It looks like they have gathered.”

Following that, all the witches rushed into the room.

Everyone, except for Selena who was guarding from a watchtower, had gathered and lined up in front of Naga.

“I think you all already know about this, but, the Brigade of 88 is approaching this way.”

The witches gulp down their saliva. One could tell there was tension written all over their faces.

“We will repel them in the same way as we did before. I believe it’s possible for us to do, but, it also turns out Kasandora Kingdom was forced to enter an agreement to supply the brigade with food, which I’d like to cancel. That’s why, this time we need to divide into groups and launch concurrent tactics.”

Saying so, Naga assigned the witches into three groups.

One was meant for repelling the brigade, one – for conducting a surprise attack on the extermination army, and another one – for protecting the fort.

Those who were placed in the repelling group were the main forces of the witches that had previously managed to push back the Kasandora Kingdom.

These were Vita, Elysione, Harrigan, Ais, Yuuki, Lily, Harlequin, and Naga. Obviously, the one in charge of leading was Naga.

On the other hand, the ambush group was formed with those who couldn’t attack with long-range spells, but could fight in hand-to-hand combat.

These were Cu, Ixine, Dora, Selena, Sanprotte, and Lela. The commander of that group was Lela, whereas, Selena was in charge of pinning down the enemy’s

location.

Linne & Linna, as well as the rest of the unmentioned witches would stay in the fort.

(As expected, not having Kay and Nonoel present with us is harsh. That's because they're both capable in offense. Still, I guess it can't be helped.) As soon as Naga double-checked everyone's duty, they immediately proceeded for a sortie.

6

Observing the terrain from above, Yuuki looked back at Naga and the rest who were on standby, below her.

“The enemy is advancing through the main road. All of them are riding horses, so I think they should enter our view completely after a short time.”

“Good job. Go with Lily and prepare an onslaught on them. Just to make sure, can you recheck on them a bit later?”

“I got it.”

Yuuki and Lily left the place behind.

“Ais, you too, take your designated post.”

“Yes.”

Running away in light steps, Ais carried baskets full of cobbles in both her hands and on her back. Naga was worried, since there was no one he could assign to Ais as her guards, besides Nonoel and Kay.

(Well, there’s no use in asking for the impossible. All I can do is rely on Ais’ quick wits.) Naga became serious.

“Elysione, there should be no problem with the mantles you have placed, right?”

“None. I can teleport at any time, as long as Mother gets undressed, but…”

“We can’t waste any time on that. If that’s the case, how about you do it here and now?”

“You’re right, but there’s one thing….”

“Hmm?”

Being glared at by Vita and Harrigan, as well as by Elysione, Naga hurriedly

corrected himself.

“There’s no need for me to watch you.”

“Are you sure? You’re letting the chance of watching my alluring body slip away, you know?”

“Ah no, I don’t think it’s the right time for that.”

(By alluring, does Mother mean herself?)

“You want to say something, Elysio? Why not let me hear it?”

Bunbunbun – Elysione shook her head from side to side with all her might.

“Harrigan, you too, are you done with your preparations?”

“Yes, I’m ready to use the dolls anytime.”

“Harlequin, how about your wolves?”

“They might scare away our horses if I call them here, so I made them wait on standby a bit away.”

“Well then, go stay by their side and wait for my orders.”

“Understood.”

Rocking her animal-shaped hair in the wind, Harlequin left running away.

The place which Naga decided for the counterattack was on a gently sloping hill facing towards the north. On both sides of the slope, there were small hills stretching out. However, since there were only shrubs growing on them, the visibility wasn’t that bad.

(The enemy seems to be fully confident, so they will most likely continue to advance through the main road. I can’t think of them taking any detours or approaching the fort from behind. We should be able to counter them… like we did before.) Naga thought so, however, a small anxiety welled up inside him

(Why is there this feeling of uneasiness? Calm down, me. If you are flustered or anxious, the witches will be affected as well. I, have to be decisive and prepared, as this is the duty of a supreme commander.) Naga persuaded himself with that thought.

He forcefully drove away his anxiety and stared in front of him at the road's northern direction, where the enemy was supposedly to appear.

7

Just as Yuuki had predicted, the cavalry of the brigade appeared after a short while.

Silver armor and helmets glittering from the morning sunlight could be seen from far away.

“Hmph, so they have come? As I thought, they are wearing silver armor.”

Vita increased at once the magic which she had kneaded.

“Let’s do it, Elysio. Our opponent this time is no ordinary one, so prepare yourself.”

“Yes, Mother.”

Kneeling down on one knee inside a hole they dug near the main road, Elysione poured strength into her body, so as to prepare herself against Vita’s magic.

Zun – a shock ran through Elysione’s body, making her become twice, three times as heavy as her normal weight.

“Kuuu.”

Elysione clenched her teeth. Since Vita’s magic had no effect on inanimate objects, there was no fear the hole would collapse.

Hiding inside a mantle, Elysione held Vita in her arms while enduring her own weight.

Suddenly, the brigade’s horses bent their forefeet and dropped down as if pitching forward.

“What on earth?!”

The cavalry soldiers landed on the ground, like there was something throwing them off. The fact that there was no unsightly crawling was proof of them being the proud elite of the Church.

Still, they couldn’t stand up.

Unable to endure their own weight, one, two of them dropped down on their knees.

“Could it be, the witches?!”

Jeweljude dismounted his horse, which was crawling, stepped firmly onto the ground and struck a daunting pose.

Jeweljude felt the weight of his body, however, he showed no sign of kneeling down.

Looking in front of him, he turned around his head and checked the surroundings.

(No sign of, the enemy? It seems this isn’t meant to be an attack but a constraint? Then, they’re going to attack us following this.) Jeweljude raised his rough voice and rebuked his subordinates.

“Prepare! The witches will launch an attack! Pick up your shields!”

Despite being told to pick up their shields, it was hard for them to simply move their body. However, the members of the brigade desperately reached out their hands toward their shields, which were bound to their horses’ flanks.

Their movements were sluggish, just like trying to perform an elegant dance, however, a large number of them somehow managed to get their shields and held them in front of their bodies.

On the other hand, Jeweljude was able to grab not only his shield, but also his lance tied to his horse. Indeed, it was a terrific strength.

And then, cobbles cutting through the air came flying.

With a few of these shots sinking into the ground and causing clouds of dust, there was one that hit a soldier’s shield.

Gagooo – Generating a dull metallic sound, the cobble bounced off the shield, making the soldier fall backwards.

Once he collapsed on the ground, he was unable to stand up by himself. Facing up, the soldier strived to hold his shield in front of him.

One third of the front columns entered the range of Vita’s magic. Jeweljude was exposed to the flying cobbles as well.

Many of the cobbles sunk into the ground near him, creating clouds of dust, however, he wouldn’t lose his composure, as he turned around and shouted an order toward his troops in the middle.

“Don’t move forward! Stay where you are and prepare the longbows!”

Longbows were bigger than ordinary ones with a powerful tension. Normally, it would be hard to pull their strings using half-hearted strength, but, everyone in the brigade could shoot from them.

Grinding their teeth, the soldiers pulled their bows’ strings.

“Excellent, shoot!”

The members of the brigade released their arrows at once after receiving a handed-down order from their superiors. The arrows flew through the air with a terrific speed, leaving behind sounds of cutting the air, characteristic of arrow feathers.

8

Making a dull sound, an arrow hit a tree trunk standing in front of Ais. Was the distance more than 80 meters? Ais stopped throwing cobbles without realizing, as she became surprised at the enemy's counterattack.

Following that, multiple arrows came flying, piercing through the ground, the tree trunk, and snapping its branches.

Ais lost her composure upon seeing that.

That's because, not even the Kasandora Kingdom's soldiers had been able to shoot arrows this far. Their arrows would lose their power and fall short before reaching Ais. Also, there would be Kay protecting Ais from arrows, so she could focus on her task. But now, Kay wasn't present. Not to mention, the arrows, which had a tremendous power and reach, were beyond Ais' expectations.

(What should I do? Should I continue to attack under these circumstances?)

Ais stopped attacking due to this unforeseen course of events. What's more, did the enemy gained more confidence? The number of arrows increased and she could even see some of them piercing deep into the trunk.

(If I pick up a shield in my left hand…. no, there's no way I could throw the cobbles like this.) Because Ais enhanced her body using her magic, she couldn't afford to put on any metal armor. Rather than that, it would become a nuisance, so the only option for Ais was to throw without any armor on her. Despite her strengthened body, it wasn't like she could become Kay. If by any chance, one of the arrows were to hit her, she would certainly sustain a life-threatening injury.

For the time being, Ais decided to hide herself in the tree's shadow and continue her attack half exposed. Still, with arrows coming more and more, it was dangerous to expose even half of her body.

Once she stuck out her head and took a peek, she noticed Yuuki's board

receiving arrows as well. After that, the person in question distanced herself from the enemy.

Despite Vita's magic restraining the brigade's movements, the soldiers still managed to counterattack with precision. Normally, the enemy soldiers would rush to try to rescue their allies, and enter Vita's magic's range However, this wasn't the case for the brigade, which made Ais perceive them differently from the Kasandora Kingdom's army.

Shifting her eyes back from the sky to the surface, she realized there was a unit of dismounted soldiers approaching in her direction.

The soldiers could neither grasp Vita's magic nor know there was a witch hiding nearby, so they were moving with quite careful steps. Still, they moved little by little and shot arrows, after which they repeated the same actions. Such was their method. The twenty soldiers continued to try getting closer, releasing arrows that reached closer and closer to Ais.

(Doing any more here will be impossible. I should withdraw a bit and resume my throws there.) Ais took her baskets and withdrew to the black forest.

9

Harlequin, who was on top of a hill, ordered her packs of wolves to charge. She tried to attack the brigade while they were being occupied with shooting down Ais using their long bows.

A part of the cavalry wearing heavy armor dismounted their horses upon noticing the packs of wolves, and proceeded to repel them, in order to protect their comrades who were focused on shooting Ais. The cavalry got off, as they knew their horses would go rampant from sensing the wolves. Despite that being an obvious thing, it was still impressive from them to act as if it was common knowledge.

(Those folks, they sure know how to fight!)

Under normal circumstances, soldiers from the Kasandora Kingdom would tremble from fear and be prepared to flee, however, the members of the Brigade of 88 were looking forward to meeting with their enemy, rather than chickening out.

Swinging their swords at the charging wolves, they cut off a few of the animals' heads. There were also wolves that managed to jump at the soldiers' chests, but nevertheless, there were few spots where the animals could sink their fangs in. Were the enemy still riding, Harlequin could've made the wolves aim at their horses' legs, but unfortunately, all the soldiers had dismounted.

As expected, against an opponent that consisted of a fully armored brigade, even the wolves were at a disadvantage. Animal cries could be heard here and there as blood splattered.

(Any more than this will be impossible!)

Harlequin shouted inside and whistled through her fingers sharply. It was a sound that no one could recognize apart from the wolves. The wolves that managed to survive turned around and ran away at full speed.

Thus, Harlequin’s plan of hindering the brigade’s attack aimed at Ais failed.

10

“Yuuki, wait! If you turn that sharply, I won’t be able to focus on casting my spell!”

“Unless I do so, we’ll fall prey to the arrows! I don’t care if you want to become a hedgehog, but!”

“Ah, no… that would be quite troubling.”

“If so… then, finish your chant!”

Again, Yuuki ascended sharply in the air, as they barely missed an arrow.

“Damn. We’ll seriously become prey if we go any lower than this.”

Yuuki turned around and looked at Lily, who was clinging to her waist.

“Is this place no good?!”

“If I attack them from this height, the lighting will be too weak to take down the enemy soldiers. Speaking of which, don’t shake this much, otherwise, I won’t be able to finish the spell!”

“We might get shot before being even able to fall off! So manage it somehow!”

“This is impossible, impossible, impossible! I can’t concentrate my mana like this!”

The two of them argued on top of the shaking board. As they did so,

Gatsun – A shock passed through the bottom of the board.

The board leaned violently as the result of the impact.

“Damn it–! We got hit!”

The moment the board changed its angle, Lily, who was holding onto Yuuki’s waist, lost her grip.

She hurriedly reached out her hands and clung to Yuuki’s body again. However,

being in a rush, Lily had little choices as to where to choose to grab.

‘Hyannn?!’ – Yuuki raised a shrill voice.

“Wai?! Where do you think you’re touching?! These are my breasts…. ahnn, yaaan, move your hands away!”

“Eh? Ah, sorry, I just happened to grab there.”

“That’s why, I’m telling you to move your hands away! You aren’t doing it on purpose, are… ahhhhhn!”

“B-b-but, it’s shaking, the board is shakingggg.”

“Don’t fondle my chestttttt!”

“We’ll fall, we’ll fall, we’re going to fallll.”

“Argh, good grief, I can’t control it anymore…. Wai, no good, no ahnnnnn!”

“Mommy, I don’t want to fall, I don’t want to fall.”

“Awawawawaawaw! Don’t grab me that hardddd!”

Yuuki and Lily didn’t crash, however, they left the battlefield behind while descending and swaying, just like a kite when the thread has been cut off.

11

A deep hue of impatience appeared on Naga's face.

(Indeed, this is bad.)

Ais' throws had become sporadic, after which they turned silent.

Naga understood it was due to her being countered back by the brigade's middle ranks.

Not to mention, Harlequin's packs of wolves were also repelled.

As well as the board, on which Lily and Yuuki rode, not being able to approach the enemy as they wished, because of the arrows coming from the brigade's rear.

In the end, not being able to yield a great result using Lily's lightning, both the girls distanced themselves from the battlefield.

The enemy's attack was precise with no flaws.

(Still, it was thanks to that commanding officer making the right decision, this is, ordering his troops to attack incessantly, that they managed to repel us.) Even though the commander who resembled a giant should have entered Vita's range of magic, he was holding the lance in his left hand, just like a staff, while giving out orders to his subordinates behind. Despite there being soldiers kneeling down on one knee, and even those who had collapsed, the giant commander's body didn't move an inch.

(It doesn't look like his movements are affected, and Vita's magic won't last forever. At this rate.....) Naga faced toward Harrigan, who was putting her dolls on standby, and gave a signal.

She was wearing a leather-made armor, however, her head wasn't covered with any helmet. After all, there was no need for that, as she could control her hair at will and knock down the enemy's arrows.

“I’m relying on you, Harrigan.”

“Leave it to me!”

As she waved her hand and responded back, Harrigan moved her dolls forward at once. Having already gotten used to controlling small-sized dolls, Harrigan could direct them from behind. And since Vita’s magic had no effect on the dolls, it was even easier for her to control them.

Not to mention, the number of puppets Harrigan could control had increased further to as many as 100 units, which is why she threw in this much during this battle.

Harrigan hid her body inside a shallow dugout while advancing her puppets towards the enemy.

12

Jeweljude who stood on the frontlines noticed small objects approaching. Formed ranks of things which resembled short wooded logs were advancing.

“Are they dolls belonging to the witches?!”

The giant commander could perceive the dolls were adjusting their bows to fire at once.

Since the cobble attack had already stopped, Jeweljude could shift his focus and put up his shield in front of him.

“A fresh supply of the enemy’s troops! They’re going to shoot this way, so prepare your shields!”

At Jeweljude’s order, his subordinates set up their shields in a hurry.

“Nuuuunnn!”

The muscles inside the giant commander swelled to the extent of almost bursting. Jeweljude moved one step ahead, as if dragging his legs.

“We shall fight back against those troops of dolls! Everyone, follow me!”

Shouting like that, Jeweljude made one more step forward. As he did so, some men behind him gnashed their teeth, made a roar, and struggled their way forward, as if trying to follow after their leader. Everyone was dreadfully sluggish in their movements, however, far from running away, some of them kept on charging at the dolls instead.

13

“M…..Mother, the enemy is…. progressing.”

Crawling on all fours inside a shallow hole, Elysione bent her head desperately and called out to Vita in a very painful-like voice.

“What?!”

Vita crawled out from the mantle and stretched her back with all her might to check the situation in front of her. Despite her being naked, she couldn’t care less about that.

Indeed, some of the soldiers moved their legs in a dragging manner toward the dolls, without any regards for Vita’s magic.

Especially, the giant who was in the vanguard walked much faster than the others and was about to clash with the troops of dolls.

“Damn, is that guy some kind of a monster?!”

Vita warped her face and threw this curse at him.

“To think there’s someone who could endure the ‘Song of Gravity’! No, is it also due to the effect of his silver armor?!”

Using all her strength, Vita raised her magic to its maximum. Because of that, Elysione fell completely flat and couldn’t even lift a single limb. Still, far from collapsing, the man who wasn’t supposed to endure the magic kept progressing, which surprised Vita.

Closely packed beads of sweat appeared on her forehead. Not just her head, but also her whole body was covered with large drops of sweat.

Vita was already exhausted, as she had been maintaining her magic.

“Mumumuu, if I do any more than this….”

Vita, whose face became deep red, clenched her teeth.

“Damn it. If that’s how it’s going to be, let’s see who will endure longer before giving up, me or you?!”

“M…Mother, please don’t!”

Elysione tried to stop her mother, however, she could do nothing by shout.

“Gugaaa.”

Vita coughed up blood, after which, her petite body bent violently.

Following that, Elysione’s body became light, which would mean Vita’s magic had lost its effect.

“Mother!”

Rising up, Elysione jumped at Vita, while waving her mantle, and caught her mother in an embracing manner from falling.

Vita lost her consciousness.

Elysione immediately decided to withdraw and pulled back together with Vita inside her mantle.

Finally, using her full power, Elysione disappeared with Vita as their heads sunk completely.

14

Jeweljude understood that the magic restraining his body had vanished.

Putting up his shield in his right hand and adjusting his lance horizontally near his left flank, the giant commander charged at the dolls in the next instant.

Arrows shot by the dolls aimed at Jeweljude's shield one by one, however, not even a single of them could pierce through its thick metal.

"Muuun!"

Using his grandiose lance, Jeweljude mowed down the dolls from right to left.

Kou – Together with an air cutting sound, five or six dolls were blown off at the front ranks.

What's more, the dolls were sent flying backwards, making other dolls collapse.

A few of them stood up, however, most of the dolls struggled to do so. There were even those that tumbled on the floor and ceased to move, as a result of their magic circuit being severed.

With Jeweljude's first strike, as many as fifteen to sixteen dolls ceased functioning.

"Is that guy a monster?!"

Harrigan raised a scream.

With Jeweljude using his heavy shield on his left and his grandiose lance on his right, it was clear he was a warrior that matched Harrigan's definition of monster.

The stream of arrows weakened together with the number of dolls. Using that momentum, those who followed Jeweljude reduced their distance at once and joined the attack.

The soldiers from the rear didn't hold lances, instead, they carried shields in both their hands. That's because they knew their leader's inhuman strength would be more than enough.

The wooden puppets continued to shoot arrows, but, in the end, it wasn't enough to penetrate through the brigade's thick shields.

As the soldiers closed their distance, Jeweljude had already struck for the second time, again, blowing away a dozen dolls and making them incapable of fighting.

With his second strike, as many as thirty dolls dropped out from their ranks.

"It's him! Make the dolls aim at that guy!"

Naga shouted in Harrigan's direction.

"Got it!"

She passed down a new order to the dolls.

"Go! Aim at that giant's head!"

The dolls that were releasing their arrows at the approaching soldiers changed their target to Jeweljude.

"Attack attack attack! Shoot him till you run out of arrows!"

Several tens of arrows came flying at the giant from the frontline of dolls that numbered as many as 160 units.

As expected, there was no way for Jeweljude to parry the attack completely, therefore, he didn't try to go overboard and ward off arrows that came from different angles. A few of them hit his armor, but nevertheless, as one could predict, not even a single one pierced through his silver armor.

On the other hand, Jeweljude was able to precisely grasp the shooting power of the dolls.

Making a single turn, he flung his large shield at the densely crowded dolls, making several of them fly off, then pinning them under his feet and crushing them.

On top of that, Jeweljude used his left hand that was now free to swing his

lance while charging at the dolls.

The soldiers that had dashed before joined the battle almost at the same time, and just like Jeweljude, they jumped at the dolls, flinging their shields while swinging their swords at them.

“This is no good! I can’t hold them together any longer!”

Being at her wit’s end, Harrigan directed her face towards Naga.

(Damn, I guess I didn’t consider this. Who would’ve thought there was a monster like this among the enemy’s leaders.) However, it was only for a short while that Naga clenched his teeth.

“We’re withdrawing, Harrigan! Continuing any longer than this will be impossible!”

“Are you fine with that?”

“It’s not a matter of it being fine or not. If it’s impossible, then it’s impossible.”

Saying so, Naga put on a smile on his face.

Was it a smile of composure or wryness? Or perhaps, a smile of self-mockery? Whichever it was, Harrigan settled down a bit upon seeing it.

“You’re right. Then, I shall order the remaining dolls to attack, so as to buy us time to escape. Naga, go ahead.”

“I’m leaving it to you.”

Saying so, Naga turned around.

(Indeed, this guy is tenacious.)

Harrigan made a light, wry smile, which quickly disappeared, and faced toward the remaining dolls.

“Go! Aim at their leader from direct range!”

The dolls formed a crowd in a bustling manner and aimed at the enemy charging ahead.

(They probably won’t deal even a single scratch, but after all, it’s for buying us time. I’m relying on you, please make one last move.) Directing a request inside

of her toward the dolls, Harrigan turned around and ran after Naga.

15

The witches gathered around Naga, who had escaped to their rear encampment. Among them, there was also Elysione.

(Speaking of which, it looks like something has happened to Vita.)

Just as he predicted, Elysione approached him and reported.

“Mother has collapsed.”

“It seems like she had gone overboard.”

(She had gone… overboard? So I guess, it’s because of that monster?)

Naga turned his head and saw Harrigan running up a slope at full speed with her large chest bouncing.

Had she had her usual appearance, Naga would have admired that view, but, since she was wearing a simple armor today, regretfully, he couldn’t.

(Ah no, this isn’t the time to admire that, me!)

Naga, who reprimanded himself sharply, lifted his head and shifted his gaze to what was in front of him.

Since their base was located at an elevated place, it was possible for Naga to look down on the battlefield. What he saw was a disastrous view of the dolls being on the verge of annihilation.

(Good grief, so I guess we’ve lost this time.)

The weak smile that appeared on his face this time was probably one of self-mockery.

(The dolls were completely destroyed, and Vita’s magic ran out of its effect. Not to mention, Ais’ throws didn’t pass through, and neither did the attack from Harlequin’s wolves. Als, Yuuki, and Lily left the battlefield…. I wonder if those two are fine. It doesn’t look like they were shot down, so they are probably safe and

sound, but….) Looking down at the battlefield, Naga became astonished again.

(The Brigade of 88 is terrifying, indeed. No, it's actually the leader whose terrifying.) There were as little as ten dolls left on the field. It was only a matter of time before they went down.

Harrigan, who had run up the slope, stood next to Naga and looked at him.

"I guess, repelling the enemy has become much more complicated, right? What should we do, Naga?"

As expected, even Harrigan's breathing was a bit out of sync.

Without replying back, Naga continued to stare motionlessly at the battlefield.

The gathered witches gazed at his profile with worried and anxious faces. As they did so, Naga came back to his senses and looked at the witches.

His self-deprecating smile was no longer visible on his face.

"For now, let's retreat back to the fort. We shall guess their next move there."

"Still, what should we do if they surround us? Right now, our defense isn't that tight, so don't you think it would be difficult to protect the fort with just this many of us?"

"Even if you say 'surround', they're only 500, you know. If necessary, we can always escape through Elysione or Yuuki."

"I, Is that…. so?"

Again, a smile appeared on his face. However, surprisingly it was a refreshing one this time.

"This time's battle was our loss. A complete loss."

"Ah no…. even if you tell me like that."

"Just because we lost a battle, doesn't mean we have lost the war. Be it one or two loses, as long as we come out victorious in the end, it should be fine."

Harrigan frowned her eyebrows doubtfully.

Not just her, the other girls tilted their heads in wonder as well.

"B, But, can we really recover after this?"

“There’s no way it’s over. And our hope of winning this war hasn’t fallen apart yet. Our chances might be slim, but, there’s still hope, so don’t make such a sad face.”

‘Kakaka.’ – Saying so, Naga laughed, which made the other witches look at each other in surprise.

Everyone present there was ready for the worst, but, judging from Naga’s attitude, it didn’t seem like he was.

“However, what chances do we have?”

Elysione asked this in a reserved manner.

“Fret not. I saw a breach in their strategy, and this time, we aren’t going to lose again.”

“Ehhh?!”

The witches warped their faces in astonishment.

Naga laughed again at the girls looking at him fixedly.

“What? Why do you look so unconvinced? I’m not lying, you know. Still, we need one more battle to turn the tables.”

“…..And exactly, how do you plan to do that?”

Harrigan asked with a half-doubting expression.

“For the time being, let’s place our hope in Lela and the rest. If they manage to do their task well, they will be able to buy us more time for the next battle. And if that happens, I’ll be able to come up with new plans to defeat the brigade.

One could tell there was solemnity within Naga’s words and conduct.

(It doesn’t look like he’s boasting or bluffing, but… just what on earth is he up to? Anyway, till now, we’ve been able to ride past hopeless situations, so we can do nothing but believe in this guy, I guess.) Having no longer mixed feelings of doubts and expectations, Harrigan looked at Naga. He was occasionally staring at small hills stretching out to the north beyond the battlefield, while folding his arms.

“I also hope Raibach brings those slave soldiers with him, as they will be

essential for my plan.”

Will Lela’s ambush change anything? And will the arrival of the slaves be meaningful? Harrigan, Elysione, and the rest of the girls couldn’t tell at all. Truth be told, they even doubted they could recover. Despite that, Naga continued to stare with a calm and daring expression at the completely annihilated crowds of dolls.

The witches, who had become restless, settled down a bit upon seeing him.

16

Naga and the rest suffered their first defeat in their attempt to defend Fort Ein.

However, Naga asserted he saw a breach in their enemy's plan.

What kind of a move will he pull out to recover from this hopeless situation?

The battle between the Brigade of 88 and the witches had yet to enter the second stage, which shall become a cornerstone towards establishing the country of the witches.

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/S%C5%8Dhei
2. ↑ http://suntzusaid.com/book/2/5